PLANTATION GAME TRAILS

By Archibald Rutledge

THE author of this volume is a Southerner by birth and owns an ancestral plantation in the Santee River country of South Carolina, — the sportsman's paradise of the South. There is an increasing tide of sporting travel to this section of the country, a section which has a fascination and wildness characteristically its own. The pursuit of alligators as well as deer, wild turkey, and the more usual game of ducks and geese, adds a certain local flavor, as does the background of Southern forests and swamps.

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PLANTATION GAME TRAILS

By Archibald Rutledge

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PLANTATION GAME TRAILS

The Plantation House

PLANTATION GAME TRAILS

BY

ARCHIBALD RUTLEDGE

Author of "Old Plantation Days," "Tom and I," "Under the Pines," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1921

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TO MY THREE SONS
TRUE SPORTSMEN OF THE COMING GENERATION
THESE PAGES ARE DEDICATED

PREFACE

To have been able, during a matter of nearly thirty years, to follow the game trails of the great plantation region of the delta of the Santee—this has been my privilege. I have seen my homeland undergo great transformations during those years: the plantations have for the most part become waste tracts; many of the old families have died out; Nature has recaptured in her inimitable way what had been, for a few years, wrested from her. The game has held its own on these desolate plantations; and that is saying much in the modern day.

In these chapters I have tried to give a faithful account of the observations I have made as a hunter and as a lover of Nature. I have tried to present the wildwoods of the South as I have known them since boyhood. And I have attempted to preserve the memory of certain characters which have appeared to me worthy of a place in the picturesque gallery of American woodsmen.

For the dual attitude of hunter and naturalist I offer no apology — save to confess that as the years advance the latter is acquiring a wholesome ascendancy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

For courteous permission to reprint certain chapters of this book, the author makes grateful acknowledgment to the editors of *Country Life*, *Field and Stream*, and *Forest and Stream*.

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PLANTATION GAME TRAILS

CHAPTER I

MY FRIEND THE DEER

It was the middle of May in the woods of South Carolina, and the time of day was noon. I was riding along leisurely, trying to drink in a portion of the marvelous beauty of the scene which stretched away from me on all sides; a scene in which bright birds flashed, wild flowers gleamed and glowed, and great trees seemed to shiver and expand in the ecstasy of their springtime joy. Suddenly my attention was arrested by a strange and beautiful sight. Far through a forest vista a doe came bounding along gracefully. She showed neither the speed nor the tense, wild energy of a deer in flight; therefore, I judged that she was not being followed. And as it is very unusual to see a deer traveling about at midday, there must be, I reasoned, some unusual cause for the doe's movements. Slipping from my horse I watched her approach. She was bearing to my left; and while still a hundred

yards away she turned abruptly to the right, leaped, with a great show of her snowy tail, a hedgelike growth of gallberries, and then came to a stop in a stretch of breast-high broom-grass. As her running had not been that of a fugitive, so her pause was not that of a listener and a watcher. Instead of standing with head high and ears forward the doe bent her beautiful head, and from the slight movements of her arched neck I knew that she was nuzzling and licking something that could be nothing but a fawn. I tied my horse and quietly drew near, but, alas, generations of hunting have made deer incapable of distinguishing between a friend and an enemy. To a mature wild deer the scent of a man is the most dreadful of all warnings that death is near.

As I came up the doe winded me, tossed up her beautiful head, leaped over the high grass, paused to look back, then bounded off again. If there is such a thing as reluctant speed that doe showed it. She went and went fast, but clearly she did n't want to go. Indeed, when three hundred yards off she came to a stop, and after that she did not increase the distance between us. As I approached the fawn the little creature stood up, swayed on its delicate legs, and took

one or two uncertain steps away from me. But though startled, it was not frightened. It let me come up to it, stroke it, and prove my friendliness. Indeed, after I had turned away from it the delicate woodland sprite bleated faintly and followed me for a step or two. Far behind, among the glimmering aisles between the pines, the doe began to approach her baby as I receded from it. When I had mounted my horse and ridden some distance away, I caught a glimpse of the mother and baby together again.

This scene of the woodland illustrates a typical incident in what I shall call the "inside life" of our Virginia deer. American hunters are quite familiar with these beautiful creatures, as objects of sport; but few indeed, even of those who know the deer well in a general sense, have an understanding of the real nature and everyday habits of these most interesting creatures. Whatever I know of deer has been gained from many years of experience in the woods; and perhaps a statement of this experience will be of interest to those who care for details of an intimate nature of the lives of the woodland wildernesses.

The little scene described shows us much about

the deer. After the birth of the fawn the mother will leave it in a sheltered, sunny spot and will go away to feed. This is a daily habit. Sometimes the doe will go several miles, and will return twice or three times a day to nurse her fawn, the frequency of her return depending on the age of the fawn. When a fawn has thus been placed by its mother it will not leave the spot. I once knew this habit to be pathetically illustrated. A negro worker in the great turpentine woods had brought me a fawn, and I was raising it on a bottle. It slept in the house at night; but early in the morning it would go in its wary, delicate fashion to a patch of oats near the house and lie down. There I always found it for its midday bottle; and there it would remain until I brought it in at dusk. Except when disturbed — by hunters, dogs, or swarms of flies — in all regions where deer are hunted they very seldom move about in the daylight; but a nursing doe's mother instinct overcomes her timidity, and she travels from place to place for her food. When the fawn is very young she never leaves it at night. This mother-and-child relationship lasts until the fawn is at least six months old. I have seen a fawn — possibly a "late" one — following its

mother in December. The doe was started first; she ran off a short distance and waited for the fawn to overtake her, when both of them bounded off.

As deer secrete themselves by day it will be interesting to follow them into some of these secluded sanctuaries in order to discover what kind of cover they like best, and what precautions they use to secure themselves from danger. Deer retire to their fastnesses in the early morning; a man never sees a deer in ideal surroundings unless he sees it coming forth to feed at twilight, or returning in the misty dusk of morning. Always an unsubstantial creature the deer is peculiarly so when seen in shadowy forests. In approaching the place where he is going to lie down for the day a deer — especially a wise old stag — will try to cross, and even to follow, water. This always is an effective barrier to trackers. I was once walking in a swamp, following a trailing hound, when ahead of me I detected a slight movement. Against the gnarled roots of a tree standing in shallow water a deer was lying, literally curled up. It did not leave its refuge until I was almost on it.

Favorite bedding-places for deer are hum-

mocks or tiny islands in sluggish water-courses. Often, too, where the growth is dense on the edges of woodland pools, a deer will walk across the water and lie down on the other side. Then he will need to be alert for danger from one side only; and that the side which his tracks have not traversed. In sections where there are growths of laurel, tamarack, scrub cedars, and other evergreens, these dense coverts will be haunts of deer. Much, however, depends on the season of the year and on the state of the weather. In the winter, on clear days, deer seek for southern exposures, sunny and wind-sheltered. I once started a drove of seven deer lying in a tiny amphitheater made by fallen logs. The dense top of a fallen tree is a favorite place with deer.

In violent storms, by night or day, deer will speedily make for open stretches of woods, where they will not be in danger of falling limbs and trees. After such a tornado it is no uncommon thing to find many cattle killed; but I have known of but one deer to be killed in this way. If the weather is rainy deer will move about in the day in search of shelter. An old hunter told me that if a snowstorm sets in during the day, he always looks for deer under the densest hemlock trees on

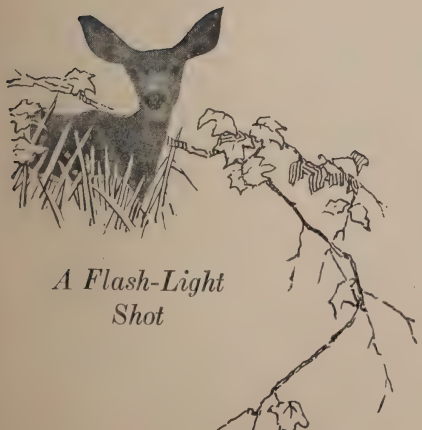
the mountain. One day I was going home through a heavy rain, when I was astonished to see a great buck cross the road ahead of me and go into a very heavy myrtle copse beside the road. Being unpursued and showing no signs of fear he was evidently merely getting in out of the wet. There was something positively bored about his expression; it resembled that of a chicken, which, being caught in a far corner of the yard in a shower, runs disgustedly for shelter.

During those periods in summer when gauze-winged flies are a torment, deer resort to the densest thickets, and at such times they do little lying down. I remember coming, on an August day, upon three deer — they were a family — on the edge of a heavy copse. Being unobserved and unsuspected, I saw the creatures behave in what must have been a most natural manner. There was continuous petulant stamping, much flicking up and down of the ends of tails — precisely after the manner of goats — and an impatient tossing up and down of graceful heads. The buck, which carried fine antlers, once lowered his stately head and made a sudden tumultuous rush through the dense bushes. Probably he did this to clear himself from the flies and in order to

ease the itching which was making his velvety horns tingle. As soon as I showed myself two tall white tails and one tail-let rocked off in standard fashion into the thicket.

As deer are seldom seen by day except when they are disturbed, the time to observe them is at night; but, naturally, they are even less frequently seen then. In regions where deer are plentiful their shadowy forms are seen crossing old roads or clearings at dawn and at dusk. No one can have an accurate idea of the true life of the wild deer who has not observed the creature browsing by moonlight. Now that most of the animal enemies of deer have been practically exterminated in the white-tail's habitat — such enemies as wolves and catamounts — deer fear the dark less than the light. Their movements are bolder and freer; by daylight a deer is seldom aught but a skulker, a fugitive. In the Southern pine-woods I have watched deer at night, and they seemed to me stranger, wilder, more dream-like creatures than any I had observed by daylight.

Near our plantation house there was the ruin of an old negro church. This stood in a circular clearing of about an acre in extent, sur-



A Flash-Light Shot

rounded on three sides by scrub pines, and on the fourth by low myrtle and gallberry bushes. For some reason the clearing had remained inviolate of growths of any kind. In the center was the ruined church, which was ringed by an arena of pure white sand. I discovered that deer loved to come to this place at night, partly because it lay between their daytime haunts and their favorite night feeding-grounds, and partly because deer seem to love open sandy places — "yards" they are sometimes called. I buried some rock salt in the sand by the old church, knowing that the deer would find it and come to it regularly. Then in the forks of a pine I built a suitable platform, about sixteen feet up. I should have hidden among the timbers of the old church but for the fact that a deer "travels by his nose." Both by day and by night a deer's eyesight is comparatively poor; it is not to be compared to the clairvoyant seeing power of a wild turkey. But a deer can generally wind and locate a man, if he is not well off the ground. During the still nights of good moonlight in November and December I spent many a solitary hour on this platform, waiting and watching for deer, and being richly rewarded.

In order that some time might elapse between my coming on the ground and the arrival of the deer, I always ascended the platform at sunset. I shall try to describe exactly what I saw and heard from this platform on a typical night.

Though near a plantation road it was at least three miles from any habitation. There were therefore absent many of those sights and sounds which characterize the Southern plantation twilight. Sometimes I could hear the melodious whooping of a negro, but usually the only sounds were from the wild denizens of the woods. In the dim distance an owl would hoot; perhaps a fox would bark; and once I heard the cry of a wildcat, utterly savage. Then the risen moon would begin to steep the woods in light, and with the coming of the moonlight there seemed to be a cessation of the wild cries; there was movement in the forest, the mysterious movement of wild life that hunts by night or is hunted. Long before I could see anything, I could hear furtive steps, glimpse a swaying bush, and hear twigs crack. Animals of many kinds were prowling; the half-wild hogs and cattle that infest the Southern pine woods; the crafty raccoons, pacing along well-worn paths; the silent foxes, the very spirit

of craftiness; the hushed-winged birds that love darkness better than light. Last, after I had been on the platform nearly three hours, came the deer.

No other creature of the forest seems more a shape of the moonlight than does the deer. It is apparently possible for the largest buck to move through the dense bushes and over beds of dry twigs with no perceptible sound. A movement rather than a sound off to my left had attracted my attention; another glance showed me the glint of horns. A full-grown stag was in the act of jumping a pile of fallen logs. He literally floated over the obstruction, ghostlike, uncanny. I noticed that he jumped with his tail down — a thing he would not do if he were startled. Behind him were two does. They negotiated the barrier still more lithely than the buck had done. Even in the deceptive moonlight and at the distance they were away from me — fifty yards — I could easily discern a difference in the aspect distinguishing the buck from the does; the stag was bold, proud, impatiently alert; the hinds were hardly less alert, but were meek followers of their master. All three of them were feeding; but at no one time did all of them have their

heads down at the same moment. One always seemed to be on watch, and this one was usually the buck. For a few seconds at a time his proud head would be bowed among the bushes; then it would be lifted with a jerk, and for minutes he would stand champing restlessly his mouthful of leaves, grass, and tender twigs. Often he would hold his head at peculiar angles — oftenest thrust forward — as if drinking in all the scents of the dewy night woods. After a while, moving in silence and in concert, the shadowy creatures came up on the space of white sand which stretched away in front of me. Now they paused, spectral in the moonlight, now moved about with indescribably lithe grace, never losing, even amid the "secure delight" of such a time and place, their air of superb readiness, of elfin caution, suppressed but instantly available. The steps they took seemed to me extraordinarily long; and it was difficult to keep one of the creatures in sight all the while. They would appear and reappear; and their color and the distinctness of their outlines depended on the angle at which they were seen. Broadside, they looked almost black; head-on, they were hardly visible. At no time could I distinguish their legs. When they

moved off into the pine thicket, whither I knew they had gone to eat mushrooms, they vanished without sound, apparently without exerted motion, and I was left alone in the moonlight.

In addition to his fondness for mushrooms the deer is also a great devourer of hazelnuts, chestnuts, acorns of many kinds, — especially those of the white oak and of the live-oak — beechnuts, pine mast, and the like. Occasionally he will eat apples; and I have known peach-trees to be wholly stripped of their half-ripe fruit by deer. Of domestic crops the deer will eat anything green and succulent; he delights in wheat, rye, buckwheat, oats, alfalfa, rice, sweet potato vines, young corn, timothy, turnips, beans, and peanut-vines. Deer have been known to pull up peanut-vines in order to get at the nuts, which they greedily relish.

In order to obtain these green crops of the field and garden deer resort to some very crafty devices. A great hunting club in the South had planted several acres of peas to attract quail; the deer found the peas in the early summer, and every night a herd of six or seven jumped the six-foot fence. The fence was raised to eight feet, and this height the marauders did not negotiate.

But possibly it was because they did not have to. Whenever I think of the jumping power of deer I am reminded of a shrewd remark once made to me by an old woodsman: "A deer can jump as far or as high as he has to." In this case the deer, to enter the field, got down in an old ditch, crawled under the wire fence, and found themselves in clover. And so baffling was the manner of the deer's entrance that the manager of the preserve could not account for it until he had sat up in an oak on a moonlight night and had seen the affair come off.

This striking instance of crafty intelligence may well serve to introduce the question of the deer's mental capacity. At the outset it can assuredly be said that the deer is so intelligent that it is impossible to classify his probable actions. As animals increase in intelligence the chances of their behaving in a regular, unvarying manner are decidedly decreased. It therefore becomes impossible for us to say that a deer will do this or will not do that under certain circumstances, for he has both a certain sense of judgment and at least a rudimentary power of decision. This intelligence is best illustrated by examples of the deer's cleverness.

A buck in cover, if he hears what he takes to be danger approaching, will carefully weigh his chances; though it is his instinct to run up the wind, he will dash down it if in such a course appears to be his way to safety. If from afar he hears the noise and decides that it means danger, he will probably slip craftily out; if the danger is near before he is aware of its approach, he may steal out silently, he may bound out with astonishing vigor and speed, or he may lie where he is, even though the peril be upon him.

After it has passed it is like him to leap up and sail off down the back track of his enemy. It all depends on what seems to him the wisest thing to do under the particular circumstances. A buck will send does or a young buck out of a thicket ahead of him or he may take the lead himself.

One day in the woods I walked within twenty paces of a buck which was lying down on the sand under some leafless scrub oaks. I probably should never have seen him but for the fact that, as he moved his head craftily, I saw the rocking antlers. He had his lower jaw flat on the ground, much like a crouching rabbit. He was planning to have me pass him by, but I disappointed him. Almost the instant that he dis-

cerned that I had seen him he bounded up and was gone. A friend of mine had a somewhat similar experience with a buck; only the buck did not wake up until my friend seized him by the horn, when there was a regular tableau. Whether this buck was deaf, I do not know; but the manner of his flight betrayed not the slightest impairment of any of his other physical powers.

When deer are hunted on sea islands, where their range is naturally limited, they will frequently leave their wooded haunts and take to the surf. I have seen a buck go two hundred yards out in shoal water and stand there for hours, with little more than his back and his antlered head showing above the water. Frequently, from a refuge of this kind, a deer will not come ashore until after nightfall. On reaching the beach after such an experience a deer is always plainly exhausted.

From these examples it is easy to infer the degree of a deer's intelligence — the brain power of this mischievous, playful, timid, curious, truculent creature.

I say he is truculent; and on occasions he undoubtedly is. A doe is never dangerous; but a buck in the mating season is a treacherous ani-

mal. It is his nature at such a time to attack. It is the time of love, of rivalry, and of combat; and a buck, with his clean, sharp antlers, his new dun coat, is a creature of ugly and uncertain temper. Keepers of preserves are frequently attacked; but I doubt if a buck in a wild state would ever attack a man unless cornered or wounded. If the records of men being injured by wounded deer be examined, it will be found that in the majority of cases the victims have been injured by the wild struggles of the deer rather than by any direct attack of the creature.

At close quarters the sharp hoofs of a deer's front feet are more to be feared than the antlers.

But while bucks very seldom bring man to an encounter, they are forever fighting their fellows, at least until some sort of caste system of superiority is established. In the course of these combats many fatalities occur, the most gruesome of which are the cases of the locked antlers. The fighting of deer is playing with fire.

Often two bucks, in a spirit of frolic or of indolent urgings of strength, will put their heads together just to feel the tingle that must come when hard horn raps against hard horn. They may break off the bout in a friendly spirit, or,

stirred by a painful wrench of the neck or a jab from an antler point, they may enter a battle which gradually increases in fury. This fierceness of the fray may continue even after the battle is ended; for sometimes the victorious stag will mutilate the body of his fallen rival. This he can do by retreating, turning, bounding back and jumping on his fallen adversary. Carcasses of such bucks have been found which have literally been cut to pieces. Wherever two bucks have been fighting, there will be an arena worn almost bare of verdure by their trampling hoofs. Occasionally on the scene of the encounter a broken part of an antler will be found. Few are the mature bucks that do not show evidences of their having been in battle.

His antlers are, of course, the pride and the glory of the buck. I read recently, in a book of natural history that has had a wide circulation, the following statement: "The older and larger the buck, the finer the crown of antlers he wears." This is not entirely wrong, but it is quite misleading. Deer antlers are directly related in growth to the reproductive processes; and a buck will wear his most massive crown when his physical powers are at their zenith. This usually comes,

with the white-tail deer, between the fifth and the twelfth years. The size of the buck does not determine the size of his antlers, though the ruggedness of the life he leads may determine to some degree the architecture of his horns. Thus, the wilder the surroundings, the heavier and the more craggy are the antlers. Naturally, this is because in savage environment the deer has great need for his horns as defensive weapons.

In the old days deer had many enemies; and even now in the wilder portions of their habitat some of these enemies are present. Man is the chief; after him are cougars, wolves, wildcats — which kill fawns — and possibly the more savage of the bears, though the smaller bears and deer are known to live amicably in the same woods.

But take it all in all, deer probably have fewer natural foes to contend with than almost any other of the wild creatures. Their closed season is long and is pretty general throughout the sections where the white-tail is found.

Occasionally a deer will be killed by a rattlesnake, but far more frequently will the rattler be killed. In sections where alligators infest lagoons, streams, and wood ponds, many deer are

taken by these grim saurians. The fawns sometimes suffer from the raids of eagles, particularly golden eagles.

The only disease which makes any considerable inroad into the ranks of the white-tail is black tongue, or hoof-and-mouth disease — anthrax. This is a highly contagious disease, and it is singularly fatal to deer. In riding the woods where such a plague is abroad I have counted as many as eleven deer in various stages of the malady. Such deer act very strangely. Some attempt to run, but fall over. Some lie quite still. Others stand, shaking and shivering as with the ague. The superb normal health of a deer, which enables it almost incredibly to recover from terrible wounds, seems unable to combat this fell disease. Wherever it appears in deer forests its effects are disastrous.

Unless attacked by black tongue, or unless meeting an untimely fate, deer may live for thirty years; Millais, the British authority, says that deer live as long as horses. But the deer's existence is precarious, and few ever attain an age exceeding fifteen years. I have seen several ancient bucks taken, and they gave clear evidences of age: their hoofs were broad, stubby, and

cracked; their muzzles were grizzled; their horns were small and scraggly; and even their motions in the woods were as near being decrepit as I suppose the motions of so alert and graceful a creature can ever become.

Such are some of the facts concerning the secret life of the white-tail deer. It is an animal vividly interesting; shy and crafty, swift and elusive, gentle and beautiful. There is no creature which seems more adequately to express the spirit of the lonely wood, the solitary lake, the silent mountain, the gloomy swamp.

He who sees a deer in its native surroundings sees all that is wildest in the wilderness, all that is most haunting in deep sanctuaries, all that is most delicately alluring in remote woodlands, in wild valleys, and on far mountains.

CHAPTER II

HUNTING IN A FRESHET

A SHARP, incisive tack in the seat of his chair, or his wife's entering the room, or the sudden memory of a friendly black bottle standing lonesome and neglected in the sideboard — any one of these things may make a man spring up animatedly. But, although I sprang all right, none of the aforementioned causes supplied the impetus. Rather was it because, in drearily reading the newspaper while the leaden winter rain poured outside, I had come across, under the "Stages of Water Report," the magic, the gladsome words, "Eighteen feet at Rimini."

These were, I say, magic words. The reason for their being of that exciting nature was simple. For the better part of a week I had been shut in the plantation house, with hardly one respectable chance to get into the woods after deer and turkeys. My brief vacation visit was drawing to a close, and the sport which so far had come my way had in no wise been memorable. But eighteen feet of water at Rimini, a small town some miles

above us on the Santee River, meant a freshet with us — and a good one, too. A freshet in the country of the great delta of the Santee means the inundating of all the impenetrable swamps adjacent to the river and the flooding of thousands of acres of delta lands. It means the coming to the plantation mainland of all the deer and turkeys and other game that have been safely harboring in the gross jungles of the river-bottoms. It means the bringing to light of all the splendid king rails and jaunty soras, whose gleesome cackling, while the waters are low and they are inaccessible, is harsh to a helpless hunter. It means the treeing of raccoons, opossums, and wildcats. In short, a freshet in the Santee insures days of great sport.

Our plantation is psychologically situated on the river for hunting in a freshet. To be plain, it is in the right place. Above us, the water, as yet unaffected by the influence of the sea tides, does not back up high. Below us, the delta widens so spaciously that those generously vast areas take care of the accumulated waters. But with us all the low-lying country is flooded to a depth of from eight to twelve feet. The water usually rises for three days, remains stationary

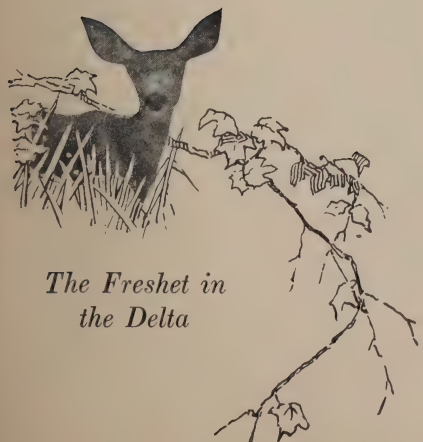
for the same period, and then falls for several days. Such a time as this is not a time for a game-hog to be at large; but a decent hunter can have all the shooting he wants, and at the same time he can honestly feel that he has taken unfair advantage of nothing.

I believe that Prince, my negro guide and companion on innumerable hunting-trips, must have jumped up before I did; for while I was standing with my back to the fire, my head and heart filled with the imagined doings of the morrow, I heard the back door click and a soft step shuffled up the hallway. Automatically I went to the sideboard, so that my dusky hunter, who had, I knew, come a mile through the pouring rain, would not take cold. In a few moments I was back in my chair, and Prince was being warmed and dried by a friendly fire and a cheerful tumbler.

"Well, Prince, what of it?" I asked.

"Breaking off rain, sah," he answered. "I done see a clean streak in the sundown. The freshet," he added, "he done come much higher."

"It's in the paper," I said, confirming him: "'Eighteen feet at Rimini.' That means high doings for us here, Prince."



The Freshet in the Delta

The good negro grinned. His smile was one that presaged rare sport. I had come to understand well its meaning through nearly thirty years of hunting with this black woodsman.

"Somethin' 's obleeged to die to-morrow," he said. And it was with that conviction that, with expectations which ran high, we laid our plans for the campaign of the following day.

When we met next morning at the river-landing the sun was rising in a clear sky, and was lighting up the wide expanses of the lonely delta country. The long rain was over at last, and we had promise of a fair, still day. Before we took our places in the boat we looked far over the waste and solitary island region, now deeply flooded by the hurrying yellow freshet tide. The cypresses, gums, and tupelos that love wet lands now stood up strangely out of the water. The canebrakes were now mere waving, whispering tufts of rustling green. Here and there in the old fields and along the river a high spear of marsh turned and trembled in the swift tide; but all the marshes proper were submerged. Lodged against trees, and against such clumps of alders and other bushes as had not been covered, were rafts of sedge, old logs, and piles of brush — the

refuse of the river swamps. Now and then a stick of good round timber, broken loose from some mooring or floated from some landing far up the river, would go sailing down the tawny current.

As we got into the dugout cypress canoe I thought it well to take careful note of my equipment, for we were off on a long trip, and at such a time it does not pay to forget anything. I had Prince to paddle: that was a satisfaction of the solidest kind; for not only is he a skillful boatman, but he has eyes before which it is useless for the craftiest wild creature to attempt to hide. Then, I had my thirty-inch, twelve-gauge Parker gun — just the gun for such work as we had in prospect, for there was nothing that we were likely to see that it would not handily bring to bag. I had some rawhide strings in my pocket, for which unexpected and exciting use was shortly to be found. Finally I had a lot of shells of all sizes of shot. Perhaps in these days I had better not say whether we considered the friendly black bottle indispensable upon such a trip. We seemed to be ready for a day of sport; and in quiet confidence we paddled across the brimming river. The sun was now well up, and its genial

rays stole comfortingly through my hunting-coat. Can there be, in a Better Land, a happier feeling than to have the rising winter sun warming one as he is setting forth, care-free, for the sport of an adventurous day?

On reaching the farther side of the Santee we hove to against a waving canebrake. The minute our course changed, from the green tufts there rose in ragged flight three king rails. Two were bagged, and the third was marked down a hundred yards away. We started in pursuit, our course taking us through a little patch of island woods, where the trunks of trees stood close together above the whispering waters. As it was difficult to get the canoe through a place of this kind by the mere use of the paddle, I laid my gun down flat in the boat — to lean it against the bow might mean to have it caught by a vine and pulled overboard — and, catching hold of the trees, helped to pull the boat along through the tightest places. It was while standing in this awkward position — a very awkward one from which to maneuver a shot — that my attention was attracted to some animal swimming in the water. At first glance I took it for a rabbit, for though we had been out only a few minutes we

had seen at least a dozen of these "swampies" huddled on trash-piles or swimming in the water. But a second look at the creature now before me made me quickly change my mind as to its identity. I reached for my gun and tried to get it to my shoulder, but the big brown shape was too quick for me. He humped himself suddenly into a vertical position and dived, his long and characteristic tail making me positive of his nature. There was no need for me to ask Prince whether or not he had seen our vanished quarry; therefore I merely motioned for him to drive the canoe forward.

When we reached the spot where the diver had gone down we stayed the boat among the tree-trunks; and although we remained quiet for some time, searching the waters for a rise, the wary old otter never reappeared. And a prime otter-hide was then bringing, even from fur-dealers, about twenty dollars! Yet I comforted myself with the saying of an old friend of mine who has long been a trapper: "A full-grown otter is the wariest of all wild creatures. It is only by mistake or accident that a man ever even *sees* an otter." But if seeing one is an accident, I fear that failing to secure him must be put down honestly as a calamity. During all my years of ranging the

delta of the Santee, this is one of the few chances that I ever had to shoot an otter; and whether this chance really amounted to anything, the reader may judge. I have seen other otters that have been trapped or shot, but I have encountered only a few in a wild state. Two of these, evidently mates, were swimming across a wide creek. The waters were sunset-brightened, and the creatures were clearly seen; but they were far ahead of my boat.

Although king rails appeared tame in comparison with what had just escaped us, we went on after the bird that we had marked down. But before we reached the place where we had seen him awkwardly alight — for he seemed incontinently to drop into a dense patch of swamp briars — I heard behind me a soft exclamation from Prince — a chortle of infectious delight. When I turned to look at him he was gazing up into the gnarled limbs of an ancient moss-draped cypress. His happy smile could mean but one thing: he had spotted a raccoon. Then the dusky, keen-eyed hunter began a crooning series of remarks to the sly fur-bearer. I should call this monologue, "Prince's address to a treed raccoon." It ran somewhat like this:

"Sleep on and take your rest! But you don't know that dis is the judgment day, and that ring-tail of yours will soon catch fire. You climb high, and you sleep tight; but you is gwine to fall far and wake mighty sudden. You done make your last track; you done open your last oyster. When your tail catch fire, you can snort your snort, but you can't blow out that flame. Why did n't you read your book better, which would tell you to go down deep in a hollow? How come it that you can lie out on that limb, so bold and public and common? Is you done say your prayers? If you want to run, let me hold your hat. But I done catch a lot of your family, so you will find company where you are comin'! Good-night, old foxy-face ring-tail!"

I let Prince enjoy his nonsense. Then I asked:

"Shall we take him along with us?"

The negro nodded his head very decidedly.

"Bad luck, Cap'n," he said, "to pass up a raccoon."

He might have added that such would be a heart-breaking mistake; for it surely would have been so to Prince.

A carefully placed load of 4's brought the

'coon down for the count. When we pulled him into the boat we found him to be an old male, with handsome thick fur. But he was a cripple: he had but three feet — marvelously like the tiny hands of a little black human baby! — the stump of the fourth showing a fresh wound. Prince then told me that raccoons appeared to be getting worse and worse in the matter of gnawing off their legs caught in traps. He said that of ten traps he had set along the river-marshes one night, *seven* had contained next morning the feet of raccoons! It is not unnatural that the wilder animals should thus free themselves, especially if, like the raccoon, they possess unusual intelligence. But I have known even so timid and simple a creature as a cotton-tail rabbit to resort to this desperate course to freedom. However, the only rabbits that I ever knew to do this were wily old males.

A few minutes after we had pulled the big raccoon aboard we secured our third king rail. Then, spying two coots doubled on some sedge, packed against the sunny side of some half-drowned bush-tops, I let drive with my open barrel charged with 8's. When we had paddled to the place we found that we had bagged, with

the one shot, not only the two coots, but a little black rail and a rabbit besides.

A word should really here be said concerning the rabbits that come to light in a freshet. On this little trip above the inundated lowlands I found rabbits to be positively abundant. Almost every raft of sedge or convenient log or stump would hold one or more of them. Sometimes apparently a whole family could be seen huddling forlornly together. Sometimes one would creep up into a bush or among tangles of vines, three feet or more above the water. On one distorted tree, whose malformations afforded unusual harborage, I counted five. During a certain period of the day I essayed to count all that we saw; but after a careful tally of sixty-seven had been made, I stopped. Of course I did not molest these bunnies. Every now and then Prince would negligently swing his paddle across one's neck and would drag him into the boat. But he was laying in a month's supply of meat; for having skinned and cleaned these rabbits, he would hang them in his cabin chimney at home to smoke and cure. Thus treated, rabbit meat is good for several weeks. Some hunters kill boatloads of rabbits in such a freshet as the one I am

describing; but I never could see wherein lay the sport. Most wild creatures have something of a chance at such a time, but a rabbit is so surely handicapped as to appear positively appealing.

These rabbits that get caught by rising waters are swamp rabbits. Than the sprightly cottontail they are somewhat smaller, their fur is browner and softer, and their tails are not pronouncedly white. Being valiant swimmers, many of them reach the mainland in a time of flood. Their behavior on high ground and in the presence of man ever reminds me of Alexander Selkirk's impression of the wild creatures on his desert island; that is, "their tameness is shocking to me." They can be caught with little difficulty, and the negroes who roam the freshet edges seldom need more than a stout hickory stick to bring to bag as many of these bunnies as they want. Swamp rabbits, probably because their race has not been systematically hunted, appear to lack nearly all those qualities of alertness, intelligence, and crafty resourcefulness that all real game should have.

Leaving the lines of canebrakes bordering the river, Prince and I pushed our canoe across a wide expanse of delta country, approaching a

high ridge on which darkly towered a group of solitary short-leaf pines. While we were as yet two hundred yards away, a great bird suddenly launched himself in splendid flight from one of the giant trees. It is not often that even one who is no stranger to wild country is privileged to see a big wild gobbler fly for a mile above the water. This turkey in his swift and powerful flight kept himself about seventy feet above the freshet tide. The course he kept was direct, and his trajectory was remarkable. From the direction he had taken we could surmise with some hope of accuracy about where he would alight on the mainland of the plantation. If all went well we should not fail to visit him.

On coming to the ridge, which was islanded but not submerged, we found it occupied by a dozen half-wild hogs that, by the somewhat dubious law of the delta, belonged to any one who should find them thus marooned. But, although Prince's glances in their direction were somewhat languishing, we did not molest them. As the flood was almost at its height, and as they had a good deal of dry gound over which to root and roam, they would likely be safe until the freshet had subsided. Such hogs, though not

The Shoreline with the Freshet Rising

travelers in the upper social circles of their race, have their merits. For one thing, they seldom are drowned, unless by mischance in their swimming they get tangled in strong grass, caught by vines, or become wedged between trees and drifted logs. They are, indeed, splendid and tireless swimmers. Repeatedly have I seen these long-snouted, lean-flanked creatures courageously buck and stem the worst sweep of tide that the Santee in spate could offer. In their build they are so uniformly lanky that they never in swimming run the risk of cutting their throats; this sometimes does happen with hogs that are fat and awkward.

Leaving the pine ridge we skirted a long, dense canebrake; and here within a distance of less than a mile we flushed and secured fourteen king rails and eight soras. The larger of these birds has my high admiration. They are gamy; they are large and plump; their plumage is quite handsome; and a good bag of them is as pretty as any quarry of which I know.

Beyond the canebrake was a long expanse of comparatively open water; for there was nothing standing above it but the sere heads of dead duck-oats. Far on the other side of the patches

of duck-oats was a miniature swamp of little cypresses whose tops were about three feet above the tide. It had been some minutes since I had fired my gun, and the cypresses were to windward of us; therefore I was hardly surprised when, being halfway across the field, we heard wild ducks in the filmy, scant shelter ahead. They were in the water among the drowned young trees; and from the language that they spoke I took them to be mallards. I turned my head to caution Prince; but from the telltale grin he wore I knew that he had the ducks' street address. More than that, he knew exactly what to do — through following my directions, which were given with mere motions of the hand. To my thinking, the pleasure of hunting is vitally enhanced if the hunting comrade be a genuine woodsman — whether a chum or a guide or both — and with such a companion the chances are all in favor of good shooting. Frequently it has been my lot to hunt with the other sort of men — the men who bring to the great and exacting craft of hunting no particle of what assuredly is the one absolute essential — *a game sense*. But my paddler had this; wherefore our stalk of the mallards was discreet.

Because Prince can drive a canoe forward silently, the careless talking of the ducks continued until we were fairly among them; until, indeed, I caught sight of three, within thirty yards, swimming sedately and with much complacency on the quiet water in the warm sunshine. These mallards quickly released their mainsprings, clearing on the initial jump the tops of the young cypresses. Two of them responded to my first salute. The third was not fired upon, as, with a roar of wings and many loud exclamations, a flock of about eighty arose within easy range. The left barrel jarred out four from the company. Quickly reloading, we got a chance at a straggler who rose late and chose the wrong direction for an escape. We had seven down; and of these we found six, which augmented our bag and gave it variety.

'Beyond the cypresses was a real swamp, where massive trees, heavily draped in gray Spanish moss, presented a forbidding appearance. Strange, weird, and lonely, it mouldered in mysterious silence. Along the darksome edges of this wood we paddled for a considerable distance, both of us keenly alert to discover another raccoon. Finally I heard Prince give a little exclamation.

"'Coon?" I asked, turning to him.

But his face, although pleased, was far too serious for a mere 'coon. His expression hinted of rarer game.

"Better 'n that, Cap'n," he said slowly, as if momently confirming his words, while his keen eyes searched a huge old tupelo, dim with shroudings of moss. "I done see a wildcat, sah."

This kind of business called for turkey-shot. Good high-base shells could do the thing — shells carrying a heavy load of chilled 4's. But it pays to play very safe with a cat. Some maneuvering had to be done to enable me to get sight of the crafty creature. He, of course, unlike the lazily sleeping raccoon, was shrewdly aware of our coming, and he did what he could to render himself inconspicuous. But, surely directed by Prince's pointing, I finally made out the burly, crouched body, sixty feet up in the massive tree. There were the sharply pointed ears, the soft, thick brown fur, and the absence of anything that might be called a brush. There, too, was that indescribable feline fierceness and cunning which seems to set the whole race of cats against man. The hunter who terminates the cruel career of one of these maurauders justly feels that he

ought, for that reason, to be forgiven many sins. Leveling my gun for the creature's head, I fired. Convulsively the powerful brute shot upward and outward for a considerable distance, his face snarling, his four stout legs wide, and intense with muscular fury. But at the peak of his jump he collapsed, falling twenty feet from us, quite dead.

Upon examination he proved to be a very fine type of the Southern bay-lynx or wildcat. I have sometimes read articles which disparaged the size of Eastern and Southern wildcats in comparison with those of the Far West. I wish the writers could have seen this old brigand of the river swamps. Even in death, and with his fine pelt soaked, he was a savage-looking creature, and his weighty and powerful build was impressive to me. When we reached home, we weighed him; and on truthful scales he was forty-one pounds. His hide was prime, the fur on it being thick and soft and in that glossy state which is a certain indication of perfect physical vigor.

After our wildcat experience Prince and I were expecting other strange forms of wild life, but we were hardly prepared to see, swimming in a rather dazed fashion through the cold water, a

seven-foot alligator! A shell loaded with a few buckshot brought him to, and we hauled him into the boat. Though he weighted us down considerably, I wanted him; for he was something of a curiosity. His long winter's sleep had been rudely interrupted by the flood, and he had been routed from his obscure hibernation quarters. Although I have spent the better part of a lifetime in alligator country, this was the first one that I ever saw abroad in mid-winter.

The freshet, penetrating the most remote recesses of the lowlands, had awakened other sleepers, and these were not pleasant to encounter: I mean the water-moccasins. We counted them by the score. For the most part they were rusty and hoary old devils, with huge bodies, and wide, malicious heads in which dully glared satanic eyes. They were thoroughly capable of striking; and their first movement when they discerned our approach was to turn threateningly in our direction. I made several large ones strike at the paddle. Three things impressed me about this performance: one was the incredible swiftness with which the snake would deliver its stroke. The actual drive of the head was not visible save as a blur. A second impression was

the vivid whiteness of the interior of the snake's mouth; this peculiar coloring is, of course, what accounts for the serpent's name, "cotton-mouth." Finally I was greatly interested in the angle at which a moccasin sets its jaws to strike. They are almost vertical; and if the fangs themselves were not curved slightly downward, they would be practically at right angles to the open jaw. We had ample and safe opportunity to study these formidable snakes; but our close acquaintance with them failed to attract us in any measure. Indeed, Prince dispatched a score with his dexterous wielding of his efficient paddle. To Prince the cotton-mouth is a social outcast. Twice while working in rice-fields he has been struck; and once his wound came very nearly proving fatal.

We had now come almost to the end of the swamp-edge which we had been following. Suddenly I saw, about a hundred yards away, what appeared to be a pair of deer-horns hanging in a bush. But a moment later I saw more than mere antlers. There, almost as big as life, was a fine buck, stranded by the freshet against this obstacle. What struck me as most curious was the fact that he seemed so high up in the bush. Al-

most as soon as we had clearly made him out, he plunged off, heading straight for the far-away mainland. He was probably a swamp deer that had already made a long swim toward the dry land, and had merely stopped where we first saw him to rest. He had a fine rack of horns that looked very odd moving above the yellow water.

Naturally my first impulse was to shoot him. But some instinct withheld my trigger-finger. I turned to my faithful paddler, whose face was now one wide smile that looked like a generous slice of watermelon.

"Let's catch him!" I said. "I have a rawhide string to slip around his horns. Perhaps we can get him home alive."

Although the buck swam swiftly and with good judgment, we were not long in overtaking him. Within two hundred yards of the brush that he had left the canoe was alongside him, and the rawhide thong had been slipped about the bases of his antlers. He made much less objection than we had anticipated; but undoubtedly, from long exposure, hunger, and extraordinary exertion, he was weak and dispirited. We got along fairly well with the big deer swimming beside the boat;

the chief reason for our avoidance of trouble was Prince's masterful handling of the canoe.

This new turn in our luck made me abandon ideas of further shooting in the freshet water. I told Prince to head for home. We were then more than a mile from shore, but this distance we soon covered. The buck occasionally did some convulsive struggling and pulling; but by good fortune we managed the thing.

Our course would bring us to the plantation mainland, a half mile above the house. Prince's idea in thus coming to land was plain to me: he still had in mind that old gobbler that had flown out of the tall pine. As we neared the shore, I said:

"What are we going to do with him, Prince?"

A full-grown wild buck on one's hands is really a kind of an albino elephant, especially if one feels that to make venison of him would not do at all. To my query Prince had no answer. He is quite elementarily human in his feeling on such matters, and he could have but one thought concerning the deer. But I could not bring myself to kill the defenseless old stag. During our trip he and I had hit up a sort of liking for each other. Therefore when thirty yards from land I mo-

tioned to Prince to slow the boat. The noose was quietly slipped from the buck's tall antlers. I gave him a slap on his big haunches.

"Go to it," were my parting words; "but see that we never meet on dry ground, old fellow."

Within a few minutes the noble animal had gained the shore, whence he slipped quietly out of sight in a friendly thicket of young pines. As he disappeared, Prince reprimanded me gently by saying:

"Cap'n, you don't get your hand every day on a buck like that."

I answered him by saying that I would take up the Laurel-Tree Stand, a good mile off in the woods, and that he would walk out the intervening thickets. The old gobbler was on my mind; but although I really thought that there was small chance of my seeing the same turkey again that day, he was not the only big bird on that mainland shore.

Leaving the canoe tied up against the river-edge we "surrounded" the thicket as we had planned. I was on a good stand for both deer and turkeys. No sooner had I settled myself there than I heard Prince's far-off driving begin. It seemed to me that he had hardly made one

whistle and one short whoop when into my sight, seventy yards away, among some very baffling huckleberry-bushes, there stepped a lordly gobbler. Before my gun could be laid true on him, he had made me out, and with all the swift craftiness of which a wild turkey is capable, he began dodging off at an angle. As he effectively screened himself by the bushes and by the tangles of jasmine-vines, it was impossible for me certainly to get my sight on him. I therefore chose an opening in the shrubbery, laying my gun to that. When he darkened it he was in high gear; but the 4's went home. So it was that when Prince came up there was a nineteen-pound gobbler hanging against a pine sapling.

"A great day's sport," I said; "and now for home."

On the way down the river in the canoe we secured other king rails; and quite close to the house a second raccoon was invited into the boat. When we reached the landing, we had a varied and interesting lot of game — all of which, except the 'coons and the wildcat, had been given a sporting chance. But, then, wildcats and raccoons are not really game. They are full-blooded "varmints."

Not the least pleasure at the close of a good day's hunt is to learn, from a reliable source, of the promise of further sport. Such was my fortune; for at the house there awaited my coming a negro whose lips, in speaking of game, speak no guile. He was there to report that a great flight of woodcock had settled in the shrubberies on the western edge of the plantation, and that the margins of the rice-field and the boggy rows in the cotton-field were "done take up" by Wilson snipe.

"Cap'n," he added, "you done lef' all the best shootin' on the highland."

This was, indeed, cheering news; and inasmuch as we had come home rather earlier than we had anticipated, late that afternoon I visited the myrtle and sparkleberry thickets, and also the cotton-field. The negro who piloted me there had told me a true thing; for in the hour before sundown as much fast shooting was afforded me as it is fair for one man to have.

This last adventure ended my day of hunting in a freshet — a day of varied and interesting sport. Though the attending circumstances were somewhat unusual, the day was rather representative of the quality of plantation hunting in the Santee country.

CHAPTER III

STALKING WILD TURKEYS

If one hunter tells another in cold blood that he has succeeded in stalking a wild turkey, the latter surely has the right to ask the imaginer of such doings just where he buys the stuff that brings on so prodigious a dream. Indeed, one such story would supply sufficient evidence against a man to warrant a revenue officer's searching his premises for a private still. A wild turkey can be called up (if he be in a receptive and sociable mood), can be roosted, can be taken from a blind, can be run out to a stander at a deer-crossing, can sometimes be persuaded to keep on coming when a shrewd hunter has located the bird and has concealed himself along the path of the approaching game. A wild turkey can even be caught in the right kind of a trap. But where is the man who can walk up to or crawl up to a wild turkey? Doubtless the thing has been done; but whenever it has come off I venture to say that the attending circumstances were so novel as to merit recording. Here I shall

briefly set down the four instances in which it has been my fortune to stalk a wild turkey; and it will be easy for a reader to acquit me of any charge of feeling chesty over the matter, for, as you will see, small credit attaches to my share of the performance.

One bright day in mid-winter I was walking down a broad road in the pine-lands which led into a deserted plantation. My setter was ranging in the near-by brush for quail and woodcock. Suddenly into my vision stepped one of those sights which is dear to the heart of every woodsman. It was nothing less than a huge bronzed gobbler — stately, superb, his neck and broad back glinting in the sun. As I was in full sight, and as the bird's nature was known to me I took it for granted that my initial sight of him would be my last. Instead, on reaching the middle of the road the gobbler paused to take in the scenery. To my amazement he did not make me out. Six feet two of me were coming down on him apace — yet he stood there calmly, as if he were a surveyor estimating levels and such-like, or an artist trying to select a view for a landscape painting. The only shot I had was $7\frac{1}{2}$ chilled; and, although my gun had long barrels, I did not

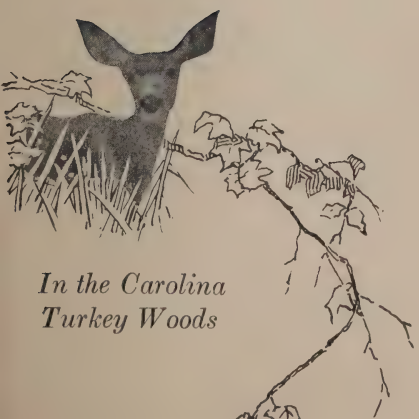
dare to turn loose short of seventy yards. This vital distance was crudely negotiated by my simply keeping brazenly ahead. Then, aiming deliberately, I let drive. The fine old fellow was considerably disheveled, but he rose on powerful wings. My second barrel did not bring him down. Meanwhile, however, my dog had come out into the road. He was just in time to see the great bird take wing. Being intelligent and swift, he gave hot chase. The old gobbler never rose higher than thirty feet, and his flight was comparatively slow. The woods being open and level, the setter kept up fairly well with the crippled fugitive. After a struggle extending over three hundred yards the noble bird came to earth; and the dog saw to it that he stayed down until my arrival.

Upon examining him I found him to be stone-blind in one eye! I felt as if some kind of an apology ought to be made to some one for shooting a blind turkey; but I surely had not been aware of the old bird's handicap. Besides, if the wary rascal had only turned his good eye to me, he would not have hesitated to give me the slip.

A few miles below the plantation, on an abandoned place known as "Peachtree," a negro had

been working an old field that overlooked, from a low sandy bluff, the wide waters of the Santee. He had planted peanuts in the field, and at one end of it some corn and peas. On one side stretched away the lonely river; on the other three sides lay swamp and dense shrubberies, out of which rose majestic live-oaks. The field in question was a most solitary place; for the cabin of the negro who tilled it lay a mile off in the pine-lands. It was a great place for wild turkeys; for there was tempting food there, and sunny dusting-places against the old fence, and that remote security that the wildest and craftiest of American game birds loves.

One day while coming up the river in a canoe, returning from a duck-hunt far down in the delta, my paddler and I, talking away carelessly, approached this lonely field. We were close to the shore; and as the field was long and narrow, extending itself along the river, anything in it could be brought within range from the boat. But we were not on the alert. Suddenly, however, an object caught my eye. It was one of the very largest wild gobblers that has ever come within my sight. He had been dusting himself in the warm sand, and as he stood up to shake him-



In the Carolina
Turkey Woods

self, he looked, with all his feathers hanging loose, prodigiously big. When first made out he was about eighty yards away — too long a shot to expect any certain results. Tensely I motioned for my paddler to hurry. But the great bird was too quick for us. Whether it was our suddenly falling silent or the movement of my urgent gesture, he took a quick little run and then rose on powerful wings. He was so very fine as he beat his way off among the solitary live-oaks that the impression he left upon me was not so much that I had been defeated as it was that I had been privileged and honored.

A wild turkey had been coming with rare consistency into one of our bare cornfields in the late winter. Many times did I try to get it, but it was too smart for me. Finally one morning I went out before daybreak, intending to wait on the edge of the woods out of which the wary bird would come. After two hours of watching I left my stand and ranged the woods for a time. On returning I saw my turkey standing out in the bare cornfield, two hundred yards from the woods. He did not see me. But how was a shot to be had at him? Beyond the cornfield was the plantation house; to right and left were open

fields. Only on the side on which I stood was there woodland. It occurred to me, if I should walk out boldly into the field, with incredible effrontery for a stalker, that the turkey would almost surely fly back for the woods, and not toward the house or across the wide open field. In a sense this game was anything but stalking; but it worked. I deliberately stepped out of the woods. The startled turkey squatted, then darted to the right, then to the left. Suddenly he took wing, heading for his deep woodland haunts. His flight brought him within forty yards of me, and on my left. That happened on a Friday — and we had wild turkey for dinner on Sunday.

There remains one tale to be told. One of my small boys (aged seven) and I were walking down an old wooded bank that connected our plantation to the one immediately north of us. The bank was so straight and the trees made so perfect an arch over it that we could see, as if down a clear tunnel, for two hundred yards. Suddenly, near the far end of the bank and upon it three graceful shapes appeared. By their trim alertness and their high-held heads I knew that they had already made me out. Controlling a brainstorm, I squatted down and pulled my boy close to me.

"Son," I whispered, pointing down the bank, "those are wild turkeys yonder. You stand right here until you hear me shoot. Don't move."

With that I edged over the side of the bank, and then began the crawl of my life. Fortunately, for the first hundred yards there was a screen of bushes. Then came briar-patches. Farther on were young tupelos covered with smilax. During the stalk I did not again attempt to look at the turkeys. I knew at what place on the bank they were, and I trusted blindly to luck and to my boy. When it seemed that I ought to be within eighty yards, I got ready to shoot. Pulling myself gingerly up to the edge of the bank I espied the three turkeys, within gunshot, and standing almost as they had stood when first seen. At this moment, however, one began to move toward another. Both heads were held high. When the shapely necks crossed, I let drive; and the drive went over the top.

A great time my little sportsman and I had gathering in those two big wild turkeys and bearing them homeward. And when I told him that he, by distracting the turkeys' attention from my approach, had made the thing possible, I told the truth for once, anyway.

CHAPTER IV

THE GRIM RAIDERS OF THE DELTA

My brother Tom, who is as incurable a lover of the wilds as I am, had written to me many months beforehand to arrange to meet him on the plantation toward the end of August. We were to put in most of our time hunting alligators on the lower reaches of the Santee. I say "hunt" rather than "fish for" because a good rifle is a very necessary part of the equipment used in this exciting sport. Of course I had written my brother to count on me.

There was one feature about this trip that added peculiarly to the pleasure of it: we were to go out in the same spirit with which ranchers hunt timber wolves or cowboys follow catamounts. We were acting in self-defense. Our plantation has, as a considerable part of it, a large wild island lying between Warsaw Creek and the Santee. On this island hogs are raised. Of these, alligators always take a heavy toll. My brother had already that year made way with several of the big solitary bull 'gators; but

he had not had time to hunt these monsters in a systematic way. He therefore decided to wait for my coming, and timed my visit so that it would fall during the period of slack work on the place.

Journeying homeward, from Charleston I drove forty-two miles through the coastal pine-lands — woods full of deer, turkeys, and quail; but as the time was late August, my thoughts were of other kinds of game. I passed in this long and lonely drive several large ponds or lakes in the woods; strange and melancholy bodies of water, surrounded and sentineled by moss-draped cypresses, dotted with great lily-pads, spectral and silent and placid. I knew these places to be full of large-mouth bass, perch, mormouth, and even alligators; but I passed them without regret, for I knew that the sport on the plantation would surpass anything that the wayside might afford. I saw much game along this summer road: fox squirrels, black and gray, coveys of quail about half grown, and once a flock of young wild turkeys; there were wood ducks, too, young but full grown, and in considerable flocks. At last, just before sundown, I reached the plantation gateway. Beyond, the old home welcomed me; and soon I saw my

brother standing expectantly on the big front porch, looking for me. It is a good thing for brothers, after long separation and after the years have begun to tell their inevitable story, to meet again as boys, and to think and feel and act as they did twenty years before.

We sat down to a plantation dinner; and lest its nature remain indefinite, I shall be obliged to make the reader envious. Remember, it was midsummer, and the day had been a hot one. But the evening was coming, and the great plantation house was shadowy and cool. Martha, the ancient negro cook, brought in a snowy dish of steaming rice, and soon she supplemented this by the chicken that, in honor of my coming, she had donated to the feast. The first sweet potatoes of the season were on the table, with sugar oozing from their delicately browned skins. We had a huge pitcher of fresh milk — for thirst. There were juleps also for good cheer. Finally I heard Martha puffing down the hall, and in she came with the most formidable watermelon that I have ever seen. It had been cooling for twelve hours in a barrel of rainwater.

"I saved this one for you," said Tom as he sank a long knife into the melon, which, appar-

ently at the touch of the blade, cracked and broke open, disclosing a matchless ruby heart, frosted with cold. After that there were scuppernong grapes; muscadines, too, that some of the negroes had brought in. Then we had cigars on the porch in the twilight, and perhaps other juleps, though on that point I am somewhat hazy.

The morning found us ready for our hunt. My brother had seen to it that everything should be ready. We had a long rowboat, "big enough to carry three men and one bull alligator," Tom said. We had a .30-30 Winchester. Lying in the boat were a dozen significant-looking lines. These consisted of lengths of stout small rope, like a clothes-line, about fifty feet long. To each was attached an alligator hook. My brother picked up one of these and said to me:

"Do you remember how we used to try to catch 'gators with shark hooks? Well, you will also remember that we had mighty little luck with that big tackle. I have tried this scheme, and it works to perfection. All I do is to take these two sea-bass hooks and lay them back to back. Then this heavy fishing-cord is run through the eyes, allowing a loop by which the

heavier line is attached. A 'gator, especially a wise old bull, will taste a large hook, and will spit out the bait, hook and all. But he will swallow this kind of a hook, because he never knows that it's in the bait until he has swallowed it."

The last item of our equipment was Prince. He is a negro of about my age. My brother and I had been brought up on the plantation; and he had always been with us in all our adventures and escapades. Now, though a man, he was as much a boy as either of us when it came to hunting or fishing. And let me say that when a Southern negro is a woodsman, he is a good one. Prince had always been to us an invaluable man on any kind of a sporting expedition; and not the least reason for our wanting to have him along was on account of his prodigious smiling qualities. That smile of his can accommodate a whole slice from a twenty-pound watermelon. Hunt with a man who smiles, I say; and though you may lose your game, you will keep your religion.

With a preliminary grin, presaging a day of old-time sport, Prince settled down to the oars, turned the boat's bow upstream, and began to

croon an old negro melody, timing himself to the beat of the oars. My brother had put me in the bow with the rifle; he kept the stern.

"We want some 'gator bait, first," he had said; "but don't pass up a chance shot at a good 'gator."

As we moved along the shrouded shores of the Santee, I was alert for anything that might suffice for bait for the lines. That country is fecund with life of all kinds, and we had not gone half a mile before I had gathered in several swamp rabbits, some squirrels, five big owls, and a water turkey. Any one of these makes excellent 'gator bait.

At this time we began to put out the lines. A man must know how to set a 'gator line. An amateur would have no more success than would a tyro setting a trap for a gray wolf. First, a "crawl" must be located; that is, a place where, as tracks, mashed marsh, and other forms of evidence plainly show, the alligator has been accustomed to come out to sun himself on the river-bank. To a tree or to a stake driven into the mud near this the end of the line is attached. Then, having carefully concealed the hook in the bait, this is hung up above the water — us-

ually about a foot. This is done by sticking in the mud on the water's edge a dead forked stick that will collapse as soon as the line is pulled. The 'gator prefers to take his food in that way. Besides, if it were left in the water, it would soon be devoured by the big bullheads and the voracious garfish with which this typical Southern river abounds. Some hunters claim that the alligator prefers his meat tainted, but there is little to support this. True, he will ravenously take carrion, yet there is nothing to show that he has a predilection for it. Since most of his diet consists of fish, he must eat that fresh; and in hundreds of instances I have known an alligator to take, eat, and apparently relish meat that was so fresh as to be hardly cold. As this account will show, all the bait that we used was fresh. I have, however, known of bait being taken after having remained on the line in the sun for several days. The fact is, the alligator is such an utter brute that delicacy in any manner, least of all in eating, is foreign to his nature.

One by one we set the lines in the manner indicated. Three times I shot at swimming 'gators, but the target was too difficult. The 'gator would show nothing more than his nose and his

eye, and as both he and I were moving, it was no easy matter to place a bullet in the little home-place, right behind that bulging eye. However, my fourth chance gave me a score. I heard the bullet strike the hard place covering the alligator's brain. The creature's tail was for a moment high in the air; then he did a nose-dive. Finally he rolled over, his paws projecting from the crimsoned water. They looked gruesomely like hands. Prince meanwhile had rowed forward with all his might. Just as the alligator was sinking I caught him by his foreleg. The three of us drew him slowly into the boat. Though dead, there were convulsive muscular movements, especially of the tail; and these Prince eyed with rueful apprehension.

"He don't die," the negro kept saying, "till sundown."

It was a pretty specimen we had secured. It measured nine feet. Its color on the back and sides were the jettiest black, though, of course, stained with river mud. On the underside the color was creamy white. He would weigh about two hundred and fifty pounds. From the size of his teeth and the powerful development of his jaws we judged him to be an old 'gator — a bull

in the prime of his life — but he was not the monster that we were shortly to see.

We had set the last line and were planning to go ashore for a little lunch. Our plan was to set the lines, to prowl about on the mainland pine ridges for a while, to rest there and have lunch; then to drift downstream in the afternoon, revisiting the lines that we had set in the morning. But our little plan, and our thoughts yearning julepward, were to be upset. We were moving along quietly, a marshy bank almost overhanging the boat. The tide was rather low, and the waters in receding had left this mud-and-reed bank apparently suspended. Suddenly, without warning, while Prince was crooning one of his mournfully sweet ditties, and while both Tom and I were rather drowsy from our setting the many lines in the sun blazing on the river, like some gigantic black torpedo driven from the battleship wall of the bank a huge bull alligator launched himself. He had been sleeping on that high muddy ledge where the tide had left him, and we had approached to within a few yards of him. His spring was the oddest and yet the most awe-inspiring spectacle that I have ever seen in wild life. His vast proportions, his dragon-like

scales, the grim ferocity of the tightly set jaws, and the formidable strength behind that launched spring had a paralyzing effect upon me. I heard my brother exclaim, I heard Prince behind me cry, "O God! de grandpa!" I threw up the rifle and fired hastily while the tremendous reptile was actually in flight. When he crashed into the water his impact jetted water all over us, while wild waves rocked the boat. Beneath the surface he vanished.

"Missed him," I said. "The blamed thing scared me."

"No, Cap'n," said Prince, "you did n't miss him. I done see how he land on his side. If he ain't dead, he will hab belly-ache all summer."

In confirmation of Prince's opinion, out of the apparently non-committal waters of the river there rose, steadily but driftingly, the blood of the 'gator. As the bubbling-up of oil indicates the death-wound to a submarine, so this blood indicated that the big bull had been reached by the .30-30. Yet whether the wound had been vital we could not say. Moreover, as the river at that place was about fifty feet deep, there was small chance for investigating. We wished to inquire after this submerged dragon's health, but it was impossible.

"He will rise," Prince assured us, "when his gall done bust."

"And when will that be?" I asked.

"By day — clean day after to-morrow," the negro answered.

And I was not unwilling to listen; for these negro sayings often have in them an element of truth. And, as matters turned out, we were to hear more of this same grandpa.

Prince pulled us ashore to a little landing that formerly had been used by a lumber company. Here in the delicious shade that near a river always seems fragrant, on a pile of old cypress logs, we ate our lunch. My brother had filled the thermos bottle with julep, which, with the springs of tender mint in it, made a man forget all troubles of this world and the next. We smoked and talked and watched the river, on whose yellow surface we could nearly always see the black head of an alligator. At one time from this single point we counted eight alligators. But we did not shoot at them. To miss them was to waste ammunition; and to kill them was merely to lose them in those deep waters.

After our siesta on the logs we wandered back for a distance through the pines. We saw one

buck, still in the velvet, but let him alone. There were plenty of fresh turkey tracks in stretches of damp sand; but the birds were not seen. When Prince, who was walking out a thicket of bays for us, thinking to start the turkeys so that we might at least have a look at them, began to shout that he had made the acquaintance of a rattlesnake, we decided that it was time to return to the boat. But first we killed the snake — a diamond-black, with fourteen rattles. He had just shed his skin, and was of a most beautiful black-and-gold shade. He seemed unusually irritated, and I have no doubt but that his new skin was tender and that his nerves were thereby kept on edge.

When we reached the boat my attention was attracted to a very strange object floating down the river. It was perhaps the oddest sight that ever came into my vision. Some carcass was evidently floating down. On it were standing three turkey vultures taking their obscene repast. Yet every other minute they would rise awkwardly in the air, while the floating body would be drawn under by some invisible power. We started in the boat to see what might be adrift, and as we neared the buzzards reluctantly

left it. It was a large hog. Following it were several 'gators which had evidently been disputing with the carrion birds the possession of the carcass.

A little way down the river we noticed a vast concourse of these same birds. They were gathered at a certain place along the shore. The cypress-trees there were literally mourning with them. We decided to investigate. We were still on my brother's property, this being the far northern end of the plantation, and we thought that some of his stock might have come to distress. When we reached the place the buzzards scattered in their heavy, disgruntled fashion. I was put ashore to discover what the birds were after. As the ground was clear of underbrush it was no difficult task to look the place over, but there was nothing in sight. I circled for some time, but without finding any dead thing. Finally, on returning to the boat my eye fell on something bright that projected from a little pile of sedgy trash. I picked it up. It was an old can of sardines that some high tide had drifted and lodged there. Carelessly I threw it into the boat. Tom and Prince eyed it.

"Fish," said Prince; "and dat's what dem buzzards been after."

It was as he had said. Hereafter, if any one should question me concerning the scenting power of a turkey vulture, I believe that this example of the bird's wonderful power in that respect will be convincing proof.

As we drifted down the river we could not but be impressed with the abundance of wild life everywhere apparent. There was never a moment when at least one 'gator was not in sight. Sailing with the characteristic splendor of his flight we saw a male bald eagle crossing the delta. From quiet estuaries that made in from the river we flushed small flocks of wood ducks. In a corner of a cypress swamp that we passed there were hundreds of snowy egrets. They had nested there, my brother told me, and he had kept the plume-hunters away. Far up in the distant summer sky we saw a great flock of wood ibises — great, stately birds as large as great blue herons, with striking white-and-black plumage. In the thickety banks along the river there were birds innumerable — chiefly these were red-wings, cardinals, brown thrashers, and soras. But what made wild life seem most abundant was the positively amazing number of water-moccasins. And these were the genuine things —

cotton-mouths with a vengeance. We saw them swimming, on the muddy shores, coiled in the marsh, and lying on bushes that overhung the water. Ugly brutes they were, with bodies about as shapely as the club-horn of a buck. Their temper is exceedingly irritable; their manner is truculent; their bite is deadly: at least their venom is highly virulent. But our boatman, Prince, had twice been struck, and he recovered. One snake that struck him was quite small, but it struck him in the fleshy part of the leg. This bite gave him more trouble than the other, which had been dealt by a monster, which had, however, delivered the blow on the shin, where there is small circulation. This shows that snake bite depends for its seriousness chiefly on the part of the body against which the blow is launched. The neck is probably the most vital. The point under the thigh where the great femoral artery nears the surface is likewise vital. I once knew a hunter to be struck there by a rattlesnake as he was sitting down on a log to have lunch. The venom was delivered so directly into the blood that the victim died within twelve minutes. On the other hand, I once had a negro woman run to me screaming from her work in a rice-field. Lashed

behind her, with his fangs fast in the callous pad of her heel, was a cotton-mouth. The snake was killed and the woman suffered from nervous shock only, for none of the venom reached the blood.

A half-mile downstream we came to the first line, which was as we had left it. Below, however, where the second was, we saw a white object, and the water was being kicked up by something. We thought at first that the object was a dead egret, but this proved a mistake. Oddly enough, it would appear on the surface and then reappear. Not until we were fairly upon it did we discover that it was a small 'gator, about five feet long, fast to the hook. But it was not alive. It had been killed by a monster 'gator, which had actually been playing cannibal as we came up. I did not see this second alligator, but the dead one showed the unmistakable marks of huge, blunt teeth, and the tanned skin, now in my possession, shows the odd holes. We hauled the 'gator aboard and continued on our course.

As we were pulling away from shore there came to our ears one of those sounds which is rare in nature — and awe-inspiring. The lion can thrill with his roaring; the timber wolf can with

his howl. I have heard a wild bull on a lonely sea island make a fearsome noise. The bull alligator can sing such a song; and it was such a solo that we heard. It is not often that a man is privileged to hear that sound in the wilds. It bears small resemblance to the commotion that 'gators in a reptile house sometimes set up. It is long-drawn, deep, melodious in a fearsome way. It seems to be the challenging call of a mature bull; but it may serve as a love note as well. It is seldom heard save in the early spring and at night. It therefore surprised me much to hear it late in the summer, on a bright afternoon. As we passed down the river the note became more formidable. It had in it an indefinable grimness. We wondered if we were to see the great creature, and if so, would it be possible to get a shot at him?

.As we neared one of the lines we saw a black form lying high on the surface of the water, in a position most unusual for a 'gator, which is used to slinking along the surface. I had my rifle up for a shot when Tom said, "He's hooked. Don't shoot yet."

"Dat's de same halligator what's doin' the singin'," Prince said.

Both he and Tom were right. The bull was on

the line; and his roaring had been due to pain, or else to a melancholy view of the situation in which he found himself. As far as my experience extends, this was the first instance of an alligator giving vent to any sound when hooked. There was something terrible and impressive about this huge saurian's complaint. But he was not too sorry for himself not to show fight. He plunged beneath the surface as we neared him. I had to get out and take hold of the line. We had a sharp tussle for five minutes, but I could n't bring him from the bottom. My feet sank into the mud, and the rope seemed to sink into my hands. Finally Prince came to my rescue. Prince's feet, through a lifetime of going barefoot, supported him on soft mud as snowshoes would on snow. He brought the great bull to the surface, and the rifle finished him. Tom said he was especially glad to get this old bull, for from the island near where we had caught him a dozen or more half-grown Tamworths had disappeared; and no doubt this 'gator had accounted for them. He was large enough to bear the blame for almost any kind of a raid. His length was thirteen feet, and his weight was well over four hundred pounds.

We could not take this monster into the boat,

so we towed him down to a landing, where we left all three alligators. Prince disappeared for a moment, and on returning he was followed by several negroes of that part of the plantation. All of them were busily sharpening knives, smiling, and looking with satisfaction at our kill lying on the shore. We have a regular agreement on the plantation that the negroes can have all the 'gator meat if they will deliver to us the hides, well skinned, and the teeth. Alligator steak, especially that cut from the slablike tail, is said to be excellent. I have not sampled any as yet, for it is reptile flesh, but the negroes declare that it makes a man happy and courageous.

Between that landing and the house we caught four other 'gators on the set lines. Judging from the bait that was taken, squirrel was the favorite, with barred owl a close second. None of these alligators was more than eight feet in length. But seven in a short day was going pretty strong; then there was the leviathan which had jumped off the shelving bank. As I said, we were to hear from him.

It was the next afternoon that a dusky hunter came to the house to report that the "grandpa of all de 'gators" had gone ashore on the far

southward point of the island. When questioned as to the creature's wounds, he said, "One ball, sah, done darken he eye."

Tom and I visited the place a day later. There on a marshy shore lay the vast reptile. On account of his condition we could not save the hide; but we measured him as he lay — fifteen feet, nine inches! My chance shot had gone home; and the tide and the creature's convulsions had brought it down the river. It had risen as Prince had predicted it would, and then had drifted ashore. We got the teeth from that bull. They look like young elephant tusks.

I have described one day's alligator-hunting. There were others to follow; and ere the weeks came to an end Tom and I were to have twenty-nine hides drying, preparatory to being tanned. We had not killed off all the 'gators by any means, for there were still many in the river, but we had accounted for some of the worst of the old rascals. Even Prince, who is phlegmatic by nature, was impressed by the extent of our sport.

"God A'mighty," he said (meaning no irreverence), "but we done make a war on dem halligator. Cap'n," he added to my brother, "dem hog can root in peace now."

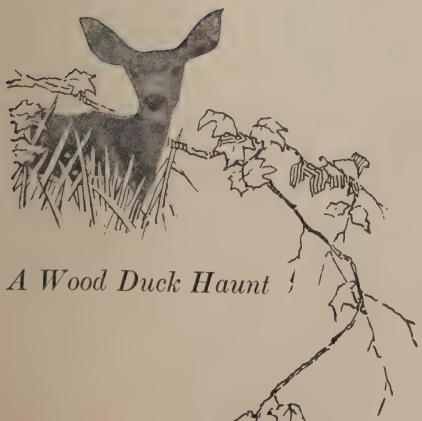
CHAPTER V

THE WAYS OF THE WOOD DUCK

It was a day late in May, and the place was a cypress-grown pond in the pinewoods of South Carolina. Fishing for large-mouth bass with a fly had lured me to such a place at such a time. The long, quiet pond was mirror-like in its stillness, reflecting sky, motionless white clouds, and the nearer objects of the scene, the moss-draped cypresses, the lustrous sweet-gum trees, and the tall, wild, white lilies that leaned over the edges of the water.

Suddenly, from behind a clump of green marsh, a series of ripples began to cross the channel in front of my canoe. I knew that it must be one of three things: an alligator swimming on the surface, an aquatic bird, or else some fish breaking water. I hoped it was a big bass rising for a May-fly. But before I made a cast one of the rare and exquisite sights in nature was afforded.

Rounding the marsh a mother wood duck came swimming with her brood. In the un-



A Wood Duck Haunt

conscious moment before she saw me, I saw the whole family mirrored in the black water. The young were tiny babies, not more than three days old. In color they were as jetty as ink. The mother, seeing an enemy near, flapped pitifully away over the water. The brood, fourteen in number, were equally aware of their danger. What they did was comical in the extreme. Every little black, roly-poly, fuzzy body tried to dive; but each was so fluffy and light that it could merely tip up. Sometimes for an instant one baby would be on his back under water, with his little feet kicking above the surface. Sometimes one would keep rolling over and over in the water. After a few minutes of this strenuous exercise they were plainly tired. They then began to swim into the marsh and the lily-pads. I pushed the canoe forward, and soon I was glad to see that the distressed mother had the whole brood gathered safely to her again.

In that same pond I found, a few days later, the nest of another duck. It was in a depression between the limbs of the cypress, some fifteen feet above the water. As the place was near home, I decided to watch the nest closely in order to discover how the mother would get her

babies into the water, and how soon the plunge would be taken. For three days after the eggs hatched I watched, for hours at a time, the feeding of the brood. This food consisted of tiny fish, mussels, and small water-creatures of various sorts. In the work of gathering this food the male duck assisted; though up to this time he had not been near the nest. Finally one afternoon, with a good many strange noises, insistent, querulous, explanatory, and with a good deal of fussing, the old mother duck pushed and persuaded one of the brood to come to the edge of the shallow nest. Quickly she shoved the tiny black ball from the limb, at the same time peering down anxiously to see the result of the fall. The male duck, I saw, was in the water below; and he took care of the elfin swimmer, who, no whit disturbed by his entrance into this new element, began to paddle about, eyeing his father and his new surroundings with the appraising eye of a diminutive and very smart infant. The other tiny ducks now began to roll out of the nest at a great rate. The mother, as if satisfied that the experiment was working well, ceased her nervous noises. In this brood there were only nine young; and soon the whole flock, joined by the

proud mother, was floating placidly on the pond's dark waters.

One other wood-duck nest that I knew of surprised me greatly. It was made in the sleeping-hole of a black pileated woodpecker, in a living sweet-gum tree, forty feet above the ground, and more than a mile from the nearest water! Unfortunately I was not able to observe this nest closely; but it has always been interesting to imagine how the mother took care of her brood. No doubt she kept them in the nest until they were able to fly; though if she did, she surely had a full house before the young were old enough to take wing. As the tree stood in a low place it occurred to me that the duck might have selected the site after a heavy rain, when a temporary pond of water might have been formed under the tree.

Most gentle, most beautiful, most lovable of all our wild fowl is this wonderful duck; and if those who hunt it for sport could have a few appealing experiences of the sort related with the family life of this lovely and harmless child of nature, they who went out to kill would remain to admire and to love.

CHAPTER VI

WILD LIFE IN A FOREST FIRE

To observe wild life is always interesting; and this interest is increased when wild animals and birds, by being placed in extraordinary situations, are obliged to exert their intelligence and their resourcefulness to the utmost. An unusual opportunity to observe wild life under most unusual circumstances was lately afforded me; and I shall here attempt to record the behavior of the birds and animals during those portentous days when the great forest fires of December, 1919, swept almost the entire coastal belt of the Carolinas, leaving havoc and ashen desolation in their wake.

During two weeks of the period mentioned I was staying on our plantation near the mouth of the Santee River; and as that region suffered particularly from the fires, and as I spent all my days and some of my nights in the pinelands, the bay thickets, and the swamps, I was in a fortunate position to observe closely the very curious and interesting manner in which many wild

creatures behaved in the presence of this lawless and most destructive power.

Especially was I eager to note the behavior of the game birds and animals, for the senses of these have been sharpened by centuries of hunting, and their methods of escaping danger of all kinds are both numerous and clever; and through patience and good luck some exceptional chances carefully to watch game were afforded me.

These wide-sweeping fires of which I write were of no ordinary nature. Their far-reaching extent was one marked feature. Then, perhaps, never in the history of that part of the country, had fires so favorable an opportunity to spread rapidly and to burn fiercely. For nearly five months no appreciable rain had fallen; the customary drought of the summer had extended itself strangely far into the winter. Ponds which ordinarily at that season were brimming, were dry. Practically all the bay-branches were not only dry, but were sere and crackling. I was able to walk a whole day through water-courses and swampy lands without once dampening my feet. Hunters of the pine-lands carried water in bottles to give to their thirsty hounds. And of course the broom-grass, the bark of pines, the withering

green of the water-courses, invited a fire to feed savagely upon them.

And in due time the fire came. Some men succeeded, by back-firing, in cutting it off from their places. But in most instances all attempts to turn it or to check it were vain. It would roar like thunder through a bay thicket, the solid flames leaping thirty feet high. It would leap roads. It devastated rail fences. And everywhere one heard the heavy falling of turpentine trees that had been burned through at the bottom. For nearly forty miles in front of us the fire extended, and I know not how much farther; but we succeeded in stopping it on a wide road in front of our house. Between that road and the river there remained unburned a stretch of wildwood a mile in width and some four or five miles long. Into this, as I was soon to discover, much of the fleeing wild life came for refuge.

One afternoon, just about sundown, while I was in a section of pine-lands that had not been burnt, but which was surrounded on all sides by the approaching fire, I was attracted to a dense thicket of bays, only ten square yards or so in area, that occupied the center of the unburned tract. The fire, burning somewhat slowly and

softly on account of the chill of the falling night, with its attendant rise of dew, was about a hundred yards away in each direction. It appeared to me a place where wild life might be taking temporary but insecure refuge; therefore I approached it cautiously, from the leeward side.

No sooner had I come alongside than I heard, among the dry ferns and the dead leaves that covered the sphagnum moss of the place, a stealthy step. I say "stealthy"; and that kind of footfall made me know that it was no half-wild hog's that I heard, though many a one had been seen running along, squealing disconsolately in a minor key over the general state of affairs. But this step was either that of a deer or turkey. Dropping to one knee, I listened intently for some further sound from the creature or for some sight of it. For at least a minute it was still; and that is a long time when one is tensely listening. Then came another footfall, but attended this time by the crackling of the small dead branches of the bays that hung above the ground. This told me that the creature must be a deer. A wild turkey may make much noise coming through dead leaves, but seldom indeed does he crack a bush, on which he does not step.

These dead branches were being forced out of the way by a deer that, having lain in the thicket all day long, was now coming out into the twilight of the pine-lands, to browse and to roam. But he was about to emerge into a very different world from the one which at daybreak he had left. I wanted to see what he would think of it all, and how he would act. The stealthy steps continued, but with many a crafty pause between them. At last, out of the head of the little pond, and not more than twenty yards from me, there appeared the graceful and sensitive head of a spike-buck. His ears were set forward, and for a moment he looked at the fire as it gleamed and crackled in the broom-grass. He was the picture of alert intelligence. Suddenly he decided on his course. Lowering his head, he stole forth noiselessly out of the thicket. To the west of us was the wide tract through which the fire had already passed; yet it was toward this that the buck unhesitatingly headed. He appeared not the least disconcerted by the ring of fire surrounding him, but moved steadily forward in that eerie, effacing way peculiar to a deer. He reached the fire, and with one great bound and a sudden show of his regimental flag, he crossed the menacing circle, and was lost

to sight in the smoky woodland. That deer was not two years old; and I doubt if he had ever seen fire before. But he handled himself in its presence as if it was nothing unusual for him to be caught by a ring of flames.

I saw that buck no more; but two days later, a few miles to the southward of that place I walked up an old, old stag that was serenely lying in his bed in some small bay-bushes, while not a hundred yards to the left of him a fire roared terribly, and while all the woods were filled with acrid and blinding smoke. I believe that, when lying close to the ground, deer do not get the full effects of the smoke from a forest fire. Judging from this second buck a deer takes small account of a fire until it has literally run him out of his covert; and, judging from the first one, he is then as likely as not to jump coolly over the danger. And if anything is true of a white-tail, it is that he can jump as high and as far as the occasion demands. The old stag which I bounced up so suddenly made off in long, graceful leaps, his course taking him parallel to the high sheets of flame. His lithe rocking away betrayed not the least dismay or doubt.

Yet these devastating fires did cause the deer

much uneasiness, and set them to roaming freely. One morning, after a night of showers, on a stretch of sandy road that was not more than a mile in length, I counted the fresh tracks of eleven deer that had crossed from the burnt areas to the unburned sanctuary between the road and the river. The sight of these tracks gratified me because of the assurance that they gave that all the game is not yet gone. Indeed, it appears to me that wherever protective laws are duly enforced, white-tail deer increase in the most satisfactory manner; and it will probably be the last of our big game animals which will be threatened by extinction.

In the swampy and pine-barren country of which I write there are quail in abundance; the coveys do not often number more than a dozen birds, but coveys are plentiful. When the fire swept their damp coverts and their sunny feeding-grounds of broom-sedge and gallberry, these birds were in sore straights; the more so, perhaps, because they are in the habit of frequenting one especial locality. If undisturbed, and if the nature of the landscape does not change, a bevy of these fine birds will remain year after year on a remarkably limited range. But when the fire de-

stroyed all their feed and all their cover, they were in a pathetic plight.

As I walked through the burnt country, every few hundred yards I would hear the calling of quail; and it was different from ordinary calling. The whole covey, strung out in line, with all the birds in plain view of one another, would set up the far-penetrating, sweet calling typical of the old mother. Many times I watched a covey thus running on the burnt ground, and thus calling in appealing distraction. It was like a lament, as well it might be. I found these birds exceedingly wild and well able to take care of themselves. They would flush a hundred yards off, for my approach through the burnt and crackling bushes was both noisy and obvious; and their flight sometimes carried them clear out of vision. Two or three days after the fire had passed, all these birds had moved into the narrow strip of country that had been saved from the flames. I doubt if any of them actually perished by the fire; or if their number will be lessened by their having to leave their old haunts temporarily.

The game having the best chance to take care of itself would naturally be the wild turkeys. In December most of these are in the river swamps,

where an abundance of choice food awaits them, and into whose fastnesses few hunters ever penetrate. Those which the fire found in the pinelands moved with their customary secret alacrity toward the river. I did not actually see wild turkeys fleeing the fire; but more than once I came upon fresh tracks which showed that their makers were heading riverward. Turkeys hate noise; and they are among the first kinds of game to leave burning woods — less perhaps because of the fire than because of the tumult of it, and the crashing of the tall pines.

While the smoke rolled skyward, a portentous spectacle, it nevertheless acted as an attracting force to many marauders. A forest fire draws all the hawks of the neighborhood: and it is indeed a strange sight to see them sailing through the dense canopies of smoke, sometimes poising above the leaping flames, and always hovering near the hottest fire. They are seekers after vermin which, fleeing for life, is necessarily exposed. There is something weird in this sort of hunting — and some reason, too, for admiring these birds of prey which can keep their poise and skill and their certain design while the world seemed in chaos.

After such a fire of mid-winter the Southern woods will lie blackened for a month. Then rains will come, taking the ashes into the soil, washing off the bushes, and bringing freshness to all things. Then soon, very soon, grass will spring; then young bushes and ferns of magical size and beauty. The woods will be green and shimmering again. All the game will return. The bucks with velveted antlers will delight in the tender bay-bushes in which they can hide, but which will not be harsh to their sensitive horns. The turkeys will wander warily back. The quail will troop once more into their old haunts; and though for many years certain signs of the fire will remain, in a single season the woods will again be a fit habitation for wild life.

CHAPTER VII

CATCHING THEM ON THE DEW

"If them there ole bucks don't run to the regular stands, why don't you go a-jumpin' of 'em? But you must catch 'em on the dew."

"All right, Ned," I answered, "but you'll have to give me a word of direction about this kind of deer-hunting."

"Walk or ride," said Ned, in his slow fashion, always speaking gravely and deliberately when discussing a sportsman's question. And I listened with all my listeners, for Ned Fort has killed upward of seven hundred and fifty deer, and he has taken all of them fairly. "If you ride," he continued, "you ought to have a horse that won't pitch you if you shoot. I favors walkin', for then I has just one critter to steady — and that's myself. Even the gentlest horse is a-goin' to fidget if a buck rips under its nose. Lordy!" he ejaculated softly, his eyes lighting with reminiscent pleasure, "but I have burnt 'em a-jumpin'! But don't ride a mule," he cautioned emphatically; "not unless you want the seat of your pants slammed up to where you wears your hat."

That was the end of our conversation, yet those few words from one of the famous deer-hunters of the Southern pine-lands led me to take up a new kind of deer-hunting that has afforded me days of the most thrilling sport imaginable. To give an idea of the nature of this sport, I can best do so by telling just how I went about it and by recording the results of my experiments.

I had long hunted deer on and near my old plantation home on the coast of South Carolina. The country is comparatively level, and for the most part it is a piney-wood wilderness. Along the rivers are gross swamps of big timber, while the pine-land reaches are broken by innumerable bays and the like. These are like little green water-courses in winter woods. Of course, in this kind of a forest much greenery prevails, even in mid-winter, and the broom-grass, while yellowed, is still standing straight, in contrast to what happens to similar growths in the North.

Formerly I had hunted deer according to the usual custom in the South. Several of us would take stands at the heads of bays, then the driver would put the dogs in the foot of the thicket. I had, in other years, killed many in that way, but for some reason the sport had fallen off. Conse-

quently, when Ned Fort, the greatest deer-slayer of my acquaintance, advised me to "jump them on the dew" I was receptive to his plan.

I happened to be the only hunter on the plantation that December; therefore what was to be done had to be done single-handed. Of course, I had hounds, but for this particular work I decided to use one only, and that the slowest dog in the pack. But Blue, though slow, was possessed of a notably cold nose. To summarize my hunting equipment it consisted of the following: One hunter, one hound, one twelve-gauge Parker shotgun, with thirty-inch barrels that know how to reach them at eighty yards, and a sufficient number of buckshot and turkey-shot shells. I usually hunt in a tan-colored sweater, carrying my buckshot in my right-hand pocket and my turkey-shot in the left. In a small pocket high up I carry two shells from which all the shot charge except two buckshot has been drawn. These are for instant use in an emergency; to finish a buck cleanly that does not need a whole load, but which does need something more than a careless approach with a hunting-knife. I have long since learned not to monkey with a wounded buck.

Having gathered this equipment I left the plantation house at six-thirty of a winter's morning. I was walking. The hound, Blue, I led with a rawhide strap. There had been a rain the afternoon before; consequently I knew that all the tracks I should see crossing the sandy pine-land roads would be fresh. The morning was clear and cool. There was hardly a breeze stirring. The woods were as fragrant as Northern forests are in October. The conditions were ideal for me to jump them on the dew.

A half-mile from the plantation gate, while still in the main road, I came upon the track of a fine buck. It was so fresh that it looked warm. It smelled warm, too, according to Blue's opinion. He almost broke away from me. I pulled him back, tried to smother his long-drawn yowl, and considered the situation. The buck had not been gone more than an hour. He was heading through the open pine-woods for a pond known as Fawn Pond, which, being surrounded by a dense growth of bays, was a favorite place for deer to lie in the daytime. It looked like my chance to sample Ned Fort's brand of deer-hunting. I therefore decided to loose Blue and to follow him closely. That he would jump the

buck was a foregone conclusion. The question was, would I be close enough for a shot? "Close enough" with a shotgun means any distance up to eighty yards. I have killed a deer at one hundred and eight measured yards, but that was pure chance. "After forty yards uncertainty begins," is a tried maxim. With all conditions right I should put the limit of uncertainty at fifty. A man can sometimes kill cleanly at eighty yards, but between fifty and eighty the chances are against his doing so.

As soon as I loosed Blue he did a characteristic thing: he smelled at the tracks voraciously, his tail waving exultantly. Then he turned completely around with a waltz motion, sat down on his haunches, threw his head up, and gave vent to a marvelous note. It sounded as if yards and yards of canvas were being musically torn. As the negroes in that part of the country would say, Blue's feelings were "sweeted." The buck's scent thrilled him so that he had to express his emotions with some degree of ceremony. Having thus relieved himself of some of his keenest feeling, he began to follow the track, slowly and certainly, giving at irregular intervals his glorious music. Nearly every time he would turn

around, and he continued his sitting down until by mischance in his fervor he sat on a sharp pine-knot. But he made up that lapse in ceremony by holding his tail higher.

As we advanced through the woods and as the trail became hotter, Blue's bark became shorter, and he no longer turned around. I did n't have to tramp his heels either; the best I could do was to keep up with him. By his change of tone and by his increasing speed I knew that we were drawing in very close. As the morning was warm and still the buck might be lying down in the broom-grass in the open woods. But as the day promised to be a bright one I thought it likelier that the crafty creature had hidden himself in the dense sweet bays and gallberries which surrounded Fawn Pond. But wherever he was I was ready for a sight of him.

Unless a deer happens to be standing, the easiest shot at him is afforded if he is going straightaway. That, at least, has been my experience. The broadsides and the quartering shots (especially those on the right) are difficult. And what is true in this respect of the shotgun is likewise true of the rifle. I do not use a rifle in this hunting, but my brother does, and he tells me

that his hardest shot is a right-hand quartering. A head-on shot is n't easy either; one thing that makes it hard probably being the inevitable excitement that a hunter feels if a buck turns and comes straight for him at close quarters. I find that the peculiar rocking motion of a deer's gait is liable to confuse the aim. To offset this I never "follow" a running deer with my gun trying to get the bead on him. To shoot at a deer in this way usually results in the deer's having a tickled tail or possibly a punctured paunch. The gun must be thrown in ahead of the deer. Then, when he jumps into the vision, nail him. There is a knack in it, and hunters following these directions might miss. As a man said indignantly to me one day: "I did just what you told me. I let him come into the sights, but he just jumped over the shot." I heard an old deer-hunter describe one of his best long shots in this way: "He came riding the briars. As he darkened I kindled, and as I kindled he courtesied."

But to return to this other lordly creature I was after and which I was expecting to jump any minute. On coming within gunshot of Fawn Pond I left Blue to work out his end of the business while I tiptoed over to the windward side of

the pond. My eyes were not taken off the place. I went on the windward side because I knew the buck would jump into the wind, even if he did get a scent of me. There before me lay the round green bay, the whole thing not a half-acre in extent. Was anybody at home? The green bay-leaves shimmered in the light of the rising sun. A pair of towhees rustled in the edges of the thicket. On the limb of a big cypress that grew in the pond I saw a black fox squirrel crouched craftily. I wondered what else besides a man and a hound he might be seeing. Perhaps he saw a beam of fresh sunlight penetrating the bays and myrtles and gleaming on polished antlers.

By this time Blue had entered the edge of the pond. There for a moment he was silent — evidently baffled. Then there came a great outcry from him, and forthwith out bounded a beautiful buck. He had jumped straight into the wind, his course bringing him within forty yards of me. I shot him dead.

"Well, Blue," I said to the eager hound as I hung the buck on a cypress by the pond, "we surely caught that fellow on the dew. How about another one?"

Blue was game, so on we headed through the

piney-wood wilderness. It happened to be the end of a very long dry season. In other deer woods such a circumstance would have rendered still-hunting conditions impossible, making anything like a stealthy approach out of the question. But in those Southern woods much of the ground over which I traveled is normally under water. Now, however, the water had disappeared, leaving a springy footing of damp sphagnum moss. I believe there is no footing in the world that can be as absolutely soundless as this. Such moss appears to absorb sound as it does water. Some of my success undoubtedly was due to the stealth of my approach. Indeed, what happened next never could have occurred under normal conditions.

Neglecting to follow Blue on a little side trail that I believed amounted to nothing, he jumped a deer out of gunshot from me and took it flying away through the woods. I decided to bide my time in the neighborhood, knowing well that both deer and dog would soon come back. My experience has been that when a deer is started, especially by one slow dog, it will play in front of its pursuer, dodging, mazing the trail and doubling, frequently returning to the place whence

it was jumped. While waiting I "cruised" about craftily, examining signs. Where I was the deer-paths were as numerous and as well defined as sheep-paths in a pasture or hog-paths in a "crawl."

My immediate environment consisted of a wide amphitheater, level, grown with gallberry and huckleberry bushes, and surrounded by swampy thickets grown to heavy timber. I was then only about four miles from the plantation house, yet it was a region so primeval that, as far as traces of his visits or occupancy were concerned, man might never have seen the place. There is a vast difference in appearance and in spirit between natural wildness and the desolate wildness that sometimes marks the track of man. This region where I now found myself was wild, romantic, lonely, beautiful, and full of a brooding quiet and mystery. As I walked on over beds of gay-colored moss I wondered how long it had been since a human being had hunted there. I stooped to pick up a huge stag's antler, bleached by sun and rain. Suddenly, not six feet from where I stood a doe bounded up. She made a couple of regular jumps and then a super-bound. My gun was on her, but I had a heart. She stopped broad-

side at fifty yards, her beautiful face full of puzzled wonder as she gazed back at me curiously. As I stood motionless I think she had a hard time making me out. In any event, she watched me for a full minute before she took some stealthy little rabbit-jumps into a thicket. I doubt if she really recognized me. Just as she was disappearing a second doe threw herself out of her bed and rocked off lithely. I had it on her, too, but even though it is legal to do so, killing a doe never gives me any sport.

The beds that the two deer had just left were examined. Evidently to a deer a bed is what a "squat" is to a rabbit. A buck prefers to lie down where his antlers have some play, but a doe delights to creep into bed, selecting the coziest places. One of these beds was in a natural hollow on damp, bare ground, the little nook being overhung with gallberry bushes. The other was in a clump of thick bushes against the base of a great pine. It was evident to me, from the deep foot-tracks in the beds themselves, that these deer had bounded from where they lay. I had always been of the opinion that deer could do that, but its truth had never before been so clearly demonstrated.

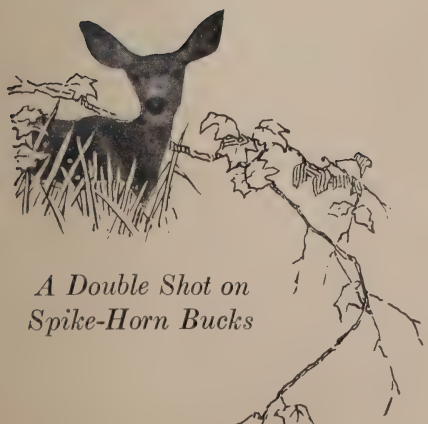
Farther on a second antler was found, this one being from another buck. On the sandy ridge spanning the huckleberry savannah there were deer signs innumerable. Turkeys had been there, too. It was the kind of place to make a sportsman happy.

Presently the voice of Blue, which had passed far out of my hearing, was heard returning. Knowing that the deer would be far ahead of him (not in actual distance, but in time, since the dog would have to unravel the dodging trail), I sat down on a pine-log. Inside of five minutes here came the deer — hopping along, then walking with head down, skulking it through, for all the world like a rabbit. He was only forty yards away and he did not see me. But from all the signs that were thereabout I felt sure that there must be something for me of a more respectable size. That spike buck will never know how close a call he had. When Blue, toiling on the mazy track, came up, I put the strap on him, led him away from the trail, and persuaded him to lie down for a while.

By the time we recommenced our hunt it was well on toward ten o'clock. Most of the winter morning's dew was gone. But having denied

myself three pot-hunter, pot-shot chances, it seemed not unreasonable to hope that the gods of sport would let the bearer of a brush-heap come my way. I communicated my thoughts to Blue, and he agreed that more sport was ahead for us.

Following the sandy ridge for half a mile, making sure that Blue would not run foul of the many fresh doe tracks that had been made in my presence, we turned into a thicket of pines that were permanently dwarfed. They were not over five feet high, and the group of them covered several acres. I knew this to be good buck ground, for a buck loves a place from which he can clear himself (antlers included) with no loss of time. As we were following one of the paths, my attention was attracted by torn places in the thick sphagnum moss. They were the tracks of a great buck and they looked fresh. As soon as the hound got to them, he said that they were. I knew, of course, that in a place so remote and secret, deer would walk later in the morning than they would if they were close to civilization. This meant that my buck might be standing in the young pines or might be lying down near me serenely chewing his cud.



A Double Shot on
Spike-Horn Bucks

"Find him, Blue," I whispered, slipping the strap.

As I stood up and as the hound tore off his first grand-opera note, out from a dense clump of young pines there flashed a tail that looked to me as broad as a regimental flag. I fired. Down he came, and when Blue and I reached him he was dead. A magnificent creature he was, a twelve-pointer, with a very unusual spread of antlers. I looked at my watch. It was ten-fifteen.

"Blue," I said, "catching them on the dew is the thing."

Hanging up this buck I returned to the plantation, rode back leading a second horse, and so got the venison safely home.

A few days later, using the same methods, I shot two more deer, besides passing up four easy chances. It all led me to the conclusion that this kind of deer-hunting has less tediousness in it than any which I have ever enjoyed, and the excitement when it came was about all with which I could conveniently get away.

CHAPTER VIII

MY HUNTERMAN

As the wheezing river-tug drew away from the decrepit wharf, my Hunterman, never losing an opportunity to be near me to the last, was standing on the end of a cypress-log which jutted out farther than the wharf into the swirling current of the muddy Southern river. My last view of him, as the straining tug turned from the river into the tortuous creek whose marsh-grown banks would shut us from sight, was all my heart desired. There he stood, now a mile behind, straining his eyes and waving his hand.

"Earth's single moments are unique," wrote Austin Dobson; and so certainly are earth's single characters. That momentary scene of farewell was unique, vividly so; and unique also is the picturesque personality of my Hunterman.

Thirty years ago we were boys on a South Carolina rice plantation; I the son of the owner of the place, and he the son of the negro man-of-all work. Until I went away to school we were inseparable companions. We were partners in all

kinds of plantation escapades and adventures; in deer-hunting by day and in 'coon-hunting by night, in riding saplings in the great pine forest, in catching alligators in the rice-field canals, in trapping birds, in breaking colts, and in doing a thousand other reckless, delightful things. Then at last came the separation. Though I was white and he was black, I was to become bond and he was to remain free. I went away to school and thence to college; then an opportunity for work in the North was offered me. But at Christmas-time I go back to the old plantation to hunt — and to be with my Hunterman.

He, during the period when I was being educated, bought four acres of land adjoining the plantation "so I can always be near you," he said, showed admirable thrift in putting his sparse earnings into a good house, was happily married, and became the head of a household. But, despite certain traits of character which seem to indicate a domestic nature, he is, first of all, a Hunterman, and as such he is unique.

He inherits his talents for woodcraft from his grandfather, who, before Emancipation, was the professional slave "Hunterman" of the planta-

tion. It is not generally known that certain slaves were given regular work of this nature — work for which they were peculiarly adapted, and to which they brought high powers of skill and abundant enthusiasm. Each plantation of the Far South had its "Hunterman" and also its "Fisherman," whose duty it was to keep the commissary of the estate supplied. These dusky nimrods became experts in their callings, and both they and their fellows took deep pride in their achievements. Nor did they lack just reasons for pride; for to them the wilds of the forest and the deeps of the rivers yielded rich and rare spoils. Thus it is related that the only channel bass ever taken in the Santee River were caught nearly a century ago by the slave fisherman of Hampton Place. Like a true and jealous sportsman he did not divulge his secret, and it perished with him. Many stories could be told of these adventurous characters who, by good fortune, were permitted to live in America the type of life most nearly resembling the life which they would have led in their native land. But I must return to their descendant, who maintains with honor the talents which they bequeathed.

My Hunterman has features that are clear and

regular. His expression is open and pleasant. I cannot say that "beauty born of murmuring sound has passed into his face"; yet surely there is visible on his dark, quiet, mobile countenance a lingering light of airy pine-woods, a sense of wide spaces and vast river-scenes, a knowledge of great nature and of greater human life. In height he is not above the medium. True, his stature is one which would set all the athletic coaches of America agog if they could see it; his chest and arms are leonine, massive. He got those mighty muscles from sawing down yellow-pine timber, ten hours a day every day for six years. Yet so easy are his movements and so loosely do my coats fit him that one does not guess his strength until one sees him, while calming a fractious mule, pick up a two-hundred pound buck and lay it carefully on the prancing animal's back. Once, when he was about to return to the logging camp, he remarked that he had a little walk ahead of him that afternoon.

"How far is it?" I asked.

"Thirty miles," he said.

"But you will not get there to-day?"

"Oh, yes, sah; it will not take me over six hours."

And I have good reason to know that it really did not take him longer.

I suppose that living in a country of "magnificent distances" has taught my Hunterman to disregard them. He thinks nothing of walking fifteen miles for a bag of tobacco and a pound of bacon; the length of the journey not seeming out of proportion to the purpose of it, for he has never known anything else. To get a pair of wild ducks he will paddle six miles down the river at dusk, knowing well that six miles, and night, and ebb-tide will, after his shooting, lie between him and home. This physical adaptability to his circumstances makes it possible for him to abstain, without inconvenience, from regular meals. When I think my Hunterman is starting for the woods with me too early to have had breakfast at home, of course his lack is supplied. But on one occasion I forgot to ask him. We hunted hard all day. At nightfall, on our return, he informed me, with high good humor, that he had had "no breakfast yet."

Come with us — with me and my Hunterman — on one of these hunts. It does not matter about me; for I do not differ materially from the common army of sportsmen who autumnly haunt our

woods and fields, trying not so much to bag game as to get back into tune with Nature — big and sane and wholesome that she is! It does not matter about me; but you must see my Hunterman at his best — as deer-driver in vast pine woods.

As we leave the plantation yard, he is mounted on a little black mule whose perverse nature he alone comprehends. Once I mounted that creature; but I was not permitted to be there long enough to learn aught but that it was no place for me. To a white man a mule must remain an eternal mystery. With a whistle and a long, mellow whoop, which resembles the blowing of a horn, my Hunterman summons the hounds. They appear in the order of their eagerness; the younger ones yelping and frisking, the older ones reserving their spirits for the ruling passion — the stern business of the chase itself. From the luring scent of fox-trails and raccoon-trails he whistles and cajoles them away: they never mind my whistle and scorn my cajoling, but his speech is in their language and its tone they diligently heed. Leaving the plantation avenue and the sweet-smelling hedges between the fields, we literally take to the woods — the vast and lonely pine-woods, sun-bright and shimmering.

Once in the deer country, we separate, I to take up a stand at the head of a dense thicket of myrtles and sweet-bays, and he to drive through it with the dogs. I wait quietly at the forehead of the dewy evergreen copse. Soon I hear my Hunterman coming toward me. He is varying the camp-meeting tune he is whistling so that it will urge the hounds on. Presently I hear a tremendous bound in the bays; then my Hunterman whoops at the top of his voice, "'T is the ole buck! 'T is the ole buck! For God's sake, don't miss him!"

Here comes the buck, bounding grandly, his great antlers outreaching his stride. Probably by the kindly intervention of Providence, which my Hunterman had indirectly invoked, I do not miss the buck. He is a fine one, with a ruddy coat and tall chestnut-colored antlers. For me and my Hunterman the cup of sporting joys overflows. After a little discussion of how the whole happy affair transpired, he puts the deer on the mule and we return home.

The next day I say good-bye to my Hunterman — and it must be good-bye for a year. Of course I write to him and send him things; some garden seeds, tobacco, and a little money; also all

the clothes which my children cannot wear without shame to kindergarten, but his can wear not without pride in plantation fields.

Another year and we shall be together again! It is a happy prospect. Our companionship may be unusual, even unique; but if it is not genuine, life has failed to teach me the meaning of loving comradeship.

CHAPTER IX

OUR GOBBLER

I SUPPOSE that there are other things which make a hunter uneasy, but of one thing I am very sure: that is, to locate and to begin to stalk a deer or a turkey, only to find that another hunter is doing precisely the same thing at the same time. The feeling I had was worse than uneasy. It is, in fact, as inaccurate as if a man should say, after listening to a comrade swearing roundly, "Bill is expressing himself uneasily."

To be frank, I was jealous; and all the more so because I knew that Dade Saunders was just as good a turkey-hunter as I am — and may be a good deal better. At any rate, both of us got after the same whopping gobbler. We knew this turkey and we knew each other; and I am positive that the wise old bird knew both of us far better than we knew him.

But we hunters have ways of improving our acquaintance with creatures that are over-wild and shy. Both Dade and I saw him, I suppose, a dozen times; and twice Dade shot at him. I had

never fired at him, for I did not want to cripple, but to kill; and he never came within a hundred yards of me. Yet I felt that the gobbler ought to be mine; and for the simple reason that Dade Saunders was a shameless poacher and a hunter-out-of-season.

I have in mind the day when I came upon him in the pine-lands in mid-July, when he had in his wagon five bucks in the velvet, all killed that morning. Now, this is n't a fiction story; this is fact. And after I have told you of those bucks I think you'll want me to beat Dade to the great American bird.

This wild turkey had the oddest range that you could imagine. You hear of turkeys ranging "original forest," "timbered wilds," and the like. Make up your mind that if wild turkeys have a chance they are going to come near civilization. The closer they are to man, the farther they are away from their other enemies. Near civilization they at least have (but for the likes of Dade Saunders) the protection of the law. But in the wilds what protection do they have from wildcats, from eagles, from weasels (I am thinking of young turkeys as well as old), and from all their other predatory persecutors?

Well, as I say, time and again I have known wild turkeys to come, and to seem to enjoy coming, close to houses. I have stood on the porch of my plantation home and have watched a wild flock feeding under the great live-oaks there. I have repeatedly flushed wild turkeys in an autumn corn-field. I have shot them in rice-stubble.

Of course they do not come for sentiment. They are after grain. And if there is any better wild game than a rice-field wild turkey, stuffed with peanuts, circled with browned sweet potatoes, and fragrant with a rich gravy that plantation cooks know how to make, I'll follow you to it.

The gobbler I was after was a haunter of the edges of civilization. He did n't seem to like the wild woods. I think he got hungry there. But on the margins of fields that had been planted he could get all he wanted to eat of the things he most enjoyed. He particularly liked the edges of cultivated fields that bordered either on the pine-woods or else on the marshy rice-lands.

One day I spent three hours in the gaunt chimney of a burned rice-mill, watching this gobbler feeding on such edges. Although I was sure that sooner or later he would pass the mouth

of the chimney, giving me a chance for a shot, he kept just that distance between us that makes a gun a vain thing in a man's hands. But though he did not give me my chance he let me watch him all I pleased. This I did through certain dusty crevices between the bricks of the old chimney.

If I had been taking a post-graduate course in Caution, this wise old bird would have been my teacher. Whatever he happened to be doing, his eyes and his ears were wide with vigilance. I saw him first standing beside a fallen pine-log on the brow of a little hill where peanuts had been planted. I made the shelter of the chimney before he recognized me. But he must have seen the move I made.

I have hunted turkeys long enough to be thoroughly rid of the idea that a human being can make a motion that a wild turkey cannot see. One of my woodsman friends said to me: "Why, a gobbler can see anything. He can see a business chance that a Jew would miss. He can see a jaybird turn a somersault on the verge of the horizon." He was right.

Watching from my cover I saw this gobbler scratching for peanuts. He was very deliberate

about this. Often he would draw back one huge handful (or footful) of viney soil, only to leave it there while he looked and listened. I have seen a turkey do the same thing while scratching in leaves. Now, a buck while feeding will alternately keep his head up and down; but a turkey gobbler keeps his down very little. That bright, black eye of his, set in that sharp, bluish head, is keeping its vision on every object on the landscape.

My gobbler (I called him mine from the first time I saw him) found many peanuts, and he relished them. From that feast he walked over into a patch of autumn-dried crabgrass. The long, pendulous heads of this grass, full of seeds, he stripped skillfully. When satisfied with this food he dusted himself beside an old stump. It was interesting to watch this; and while he was doing it I wondered if it was not my chance to leave the chimney, make a detour, and come up behind the stump. But of course, just as I decided to do this, he got up, shook a small cloud of dust from his feathers, stepped off into the open, and there began to preen himself.

A short while thereafter he went down to a marshy edge, there finding a warm, sandy hole on the sunny side of a briar-patch, where he

continued his dusting and loafing. I believe that he knew the stump, which shut off his view of what was behind it, was no place to choose for a midday rest.

All this time I waited patiently; interested, to be sure, but I should have been vastly more so if the lordly old fellow had turned my way. This I expected him to do when he got tired of loafing. Instead, he deliberately walked into the tall ranks of the marsh, which extended riverward for half a mile. At that maneuver of his I hurried forward, hoping to flush him on the margin; but he had vanished for that day. But though he had escaped me the sight of him had made me keen to follow him even to that last hour when he should be obliged to accompany me home.

Just as I was turning away from the marsh I heard a turkey-call from the shelter of a big live-oak beside the old chimney. My heart told me that the caller was Dade Saunders and that he was after my turkey. I walked over to where he was making his box-call plead musically. Dade expressed no surprise upon seeing me. We greeted each other as two hunters who, being not over-friendly, greet when they find themselves after the same game.

"I seen the tracks of his number 9's," said Dade. "I believe he limps in the one foot since I shot him last Sunday will be a week."

"He must be a big bird," was my comment. "You were lucky to have a shot."

Dade's eyes became hungrily bright. The great gobbler was even then in his mind's vision.

"He's the biggest in all this country, and I'm a-going to get him yet. You jest watch me."

"I suppose you will, Dade. You are certainly the best turkey-hunter of these parts."

My hope was to make him over-confident; and praise is a fearful corrupter of mankind. It is not unlikely to make a hunter miss a shot. I remember a sportsman friend of mine once laughingly said: "If a man tells me I am a good shot, I will miss my next chance, as sure as guns; but if he cusses me and tells me that I am not worth a darn, then watch me shoot!"

For the time Dade Saunders and I parted. I walked off toward the marsh, whistling an old song. The sound of this tune was to make the old gobbler put a little more distance between himself and the poacher. Besides, I could feel that it was right of me to do this; for while I was on my own land my visitor was trespassing.

I hung around the marsh-edges and the scrub-oak thickets for a while; but no gun spoke out. The silence indicated that the old gobbler's intelligence plus my whistling game had "foiled the relentless" Dade. It was the week later when the three of us met again.

Not far from the peanut-field there is a plantation corner. Now, most plantation corners are graveyards; that is, cemeteries of the old days where negro slaves were buried. Occasionally now a negro is buried, but through the jungle-like growths pathways have to be cut to enable the cortège to enter. Such a place is the wildest wilderness. Here grow towering pines, mournful and moss-draped. Here are great hollies, canopied with the running vines of the yellow jasmine; here are thickets of myrtle, sweet gum, young pines, and sparkleberries. If a covey of quail goes into such a place, you might just as well whistle off your dog, for both you and he may get lost in there while trying to find the birds.

Here, because in such a place they can hide from the heat and from the gauze-winged flies, deer love to come in the summer. In the winter such a place on a plantation is a haunt for wood-

cock, an excellent range for wild turkeys (since here great live-oaks shower down their sweet acorns), and a harbor for foxes and for other creatures of the general varmint type. Here in the great pines and oaks turkeys love to roost; such a place seems solitary, remote, and detached from the life of the world. If the sun approaches setting, no negro will be found near a graveyard of this mournful type. It was on the borders of just such a place that I roosted the splendid gobbler.

The sunset of a mid-December day glowed warmly. I had left the plantation house an hour before in order to stroll the roads through the shrubberies of the home tract, counting (as I always do) the number of deer and turkey tracks that have recently been made in the soft, damp sand. Coming at last near the dense corner I sat with my back against the bole of a monster pine. Aside from the pleasure of being a hunter there is a delight in being a mere watcher in the wild-woods.

About two hundred yards away, on a gentle rise in the pine-lands, there was a little sunny hill grown to scrub oaks. Their standing sparsely enabled me clearly to see what I now beheld.

Into my vision, with the long, level rays of the sinking sun gleaming softly on the bronze of his neck and shoulders, the great gobbler stepped with superb beauty. Though he deigned to scratch once or twice in the leaves, and peck indifferently at what he thus uncovered, I well knew that he was bent on going to roost; for not only was it nearly his bedtime, but he appeared to be examining, with critical appraisal, every tall tree in his neighborhood.

In my sight he remained ten minutes; then he stepped into a patch of gallberries. I sat where I was, in silence and in motionlessness, trying earnestly to imitate those lying in the ancient graves behind me. For five minutes the big bronzed bird of the pine-lands kept me in suspense. Then he suddenly shot his great bulk into the air, beating his ponderous but graceful way into the huge pine that seemed to sentry that whole wild tract of woodland.

Marking with strained eyes every inch of his flight I saw him when he came to the limb he had selected. He sailed up to it and alighted with much scraping of bark with his big and clumsy shoes. So there, outlined against the warm colors of that winter sunset sky, was my gobbler. It

was hard, indeed, to take my sight from him; but I did so in order to get my bearings in relation to his position. His flight had brought him somewhat nearer to me than he had been while on the ground. But he was still far out of gun-range.

To see how I was going to maneuver to approach him there was no use for me to look into the graveyard; for therein a man can hardly set a foot, and certainly in such thickets he cannot move without rivaling, by the conspicuous noise he makes, a wild bull of Bashan. Down the dim pine-land road I therefore glanced. A moving object along its edge attracted my attention. It skulked. Like a ghostly thing it seemed to flit down from pine to pine. But despite my proximity to a cemetery, I knew that I was looking at no "hant." It was Dade Saunders.

He, as well as I, had roosted the old gobbler, and he was trying to get up to him. Moreover, he was at least fifty yards closer to him than I was. Instinct told me to shout to him to get off my land; but then a better idea came. Quickly my turkey-call was brought into use.

As was intended, the first note was natural and good. An old hen-turkey was querulous. But then there came some heart-stilling squeaks

and shrills. In the pine-wood dusk two things were noticed: Dade's making a furious gesture was one; the other was the old gobbler's launching himself out from the pine, winging a lordly way far over the graveyard thicket and the lone wood beyond. I walked down slowly and peeringly to meet Dade.

"Your call's broke," he announced.

"What makes you think so?" I asked.

"Sounds awful funny to me," he said; "more than likely it might scare a turkey. Seen him lately?" he asked.

"You are better at seeing that old bird than I am, Dade."

Thus I put him off; and shortly thereafter we parted. He was sure that I had not seen the gobbler; and that suited me all right.

Then came the day of days. I was up at dawn, and when certain red lights between the stems of the pines announced daybreak I was at the far southern end of the plantation, on a road on either side of which were good turkey woods. I just had a notion that my gobbler might be found here, as he had of late taken to roosting in a tupelo swamp near the river and adjacent to these woodlands.

Where some lumbermen had cut away the big timber, sawing the huge short-leaf pines close to the ground, I took my stand (or my seat) on one of these big stumps. Before me was a tangle of undergrowth; but it was not very thick or high. It gave me the screen I wanted; but if my turkey came out through it I could see to shoot.

It was just before sunrise that I began to call. It was a little early in the year (then the end of February) to lure a solitary gobbler by a call; but otherwise the chance looked good. And I am vain enough to say that my willow box was not broken that morning. Yet it was not I but two Cooper's hawks that got the old wily rascal excited.

They were circling high and crying shrilly over a certain stretch of deep woodland; and the gobbler, undoubtedly irritated by the sounds, or at least not to be outdone by two mere marauders on a domain which he felt to be his own, would gobble fiercely every time one of the hawks would cry. The hawks had their eyes on a building site; wherefore their excited maneuvering and shrilling continued; and as long as they kept up their screaming so long did the wild gobbler answer in rivalry or provoked superiority, until

his wattles must have been fiery red and near to bursting.

I had an idea that the hawks were directing some of their crying at the turkey, in which case the performance was a genuine scolding match of the wilderness. And before it was over several gray squirrels had added to the already raucous debate their impatient, coughing barks. This business lasted nearly an hour, until the sun had begun to make the thickets "smoke off" their shining burden of morning dew.

I had let up on my calling for a while; but when the hawks had at last been silenced by distance, I began once more to plead. Had I had a gobbler call the now enraged turkey would have come to me as straight as a surveyor runs a line. But I did my best with the one I had. I was answered by one short gobble, then by silence.

I laid down my call on the stump and took up my gun. It was in such a position that I could shoot quickly without much further motion. It is a genuine feat to shoot a turkey on the ground after he has made you out. I felt that a great moment was coming.

But you know how hunter's luck sometimes turns. Just as I thought it was about time for him

to be in the pine thicket ahead of me, when, indeed, I thought I had heard his heavy but cautious step, from across the road, where lay the companion tract of turkey woods to the one I was in, came a delicately pleading call from a hen-turkey. The thing was irresistible to the gobbler; but I knew it to be Dade Saunders. What should I do?

At such a time a man has to use all the head work he has. And in hunting I had long since learned that that often means not to do a darn thing but to sit tight. All I did was to put my gun to my face. If the gobbler was going to Dade he might pass me. I had started him coming; if Dade kept him going he might run within hailing distance. Dade was farther back in the woods than I was. I waited.

No step was heard. No twig was snapped. But suddenly, fifty yards ahead of me, the great bird emerged from the thicket of pines. For an instant the sun gleamed on his royal plumage. My gun was on him, but the glint of the sun along the barrel dazzled me. I stayed my finger on the trigger. At that instant he made me out. What he did was smart. He made himself so small that I believed it to be a second turkey. Then

he ran crouching through the vines and huckleberry bushes.

Four times I thought I had my gun on him, but his dodging was that of an expert. He was getting away. Moreover, he was making straight for Dade. There was a small gap in the bushes sixty yards from me off to my left. He had not yet crossed that. I threw my gun in the opening. In a moment he flashed into it running like a race-horse. I let him have it. And I saw him go down.

Five minutes later, when I had hung him on a scrub oak and was admiring the entire beauty of him, a knowing, catlike step sounded behind me.

"Well, sir," said Dade, a generous admiration for the beauty of the great bird overcoming other less kindly emotions, "so you beat me to him."

There was nothing for me to do but to agree. I then asked Dade to walk home with me so that we might weigh him. He carried the scales well down at the twenty-five-pound mark. An extraordinary feature of his manly equipment was the presence of three separate beards, one beneath the other, no two connected. And his spurs were respectable rapiers.

"Dade," I said, "what am I going to do with

this gobbler? I am alone here on the plantation."

The pine-land poacher did not solve my problem for me.

"I tell you," said I, trying to forget the matter of the five velveted bucks, "some of the boys from down the river are going to come up on Sunday to see how he tastes. Will you join us?"

You know Dade Saunders's answer; for when a hunter refuses an invitation to help eat a wild turkey, he can be sold to a circus.

CHAPTER X

THE DEER AND THE HOUND

No plantation really looks natural unless there are deer-hounds loafing on the premises; and among the most exciting game trails in Southern hunting are those found and followed by these same faithful allies of the sportsman.

A word of explanation, which is, however, distinctly not one of apology, is perhaps necessary in writing about the deer and the hound. The reason is because in many States the use of dogs in deer-hunting is strictly prohibited by law. I am sure, however, that such a law is not to be interpreted as denouncing as barbarous the use of hounds, but is rather to be considered merely as a measure for the preservation of game. True, in the North, the hounding of deer on ice and on crusted snow is a cruel practice; but the barbarity of it is due less to the method pursued than to the conditions attending such a hunt. I agree with Dr. William T. Hornaday when he contends that deer-hounds should never be used in the North; but I always think such prohibition

is geographically limited. For example, I can be in full sympathy with Colonel Roosevelt when he describes how he enjoyed hunting the white-tail with hounds on the plantations on the Gulf Coast of Mr. John McIlhenny and Mr. John M. Parker. But really, if deer were abundant in their Northern haunts, and if they were hunted in the forepart of the autumn instead of in the latter part, there would be little to say against the use of hounds. At least one great advantage would be that a seriously wounded deer would rarely escape. Perhaps an unscrupulous use of dogs against deer is probably what killed the sport in the North. We use bird-dogs without scruple; and the deer-hound has a longer and nobler lineage, and the traditions concerning his ancestors' following of the stag are more romantic than any blood or any traditions that a bird-dog can show. It is true that bird-dogs have been trained to hunt deer. On this matter we have the word of no less an authority than T. S. Van Dyke. I confess that I have had no experience with bird-dogs that follow, find, and even *point* deer, although while hunting quail in the pine-lands I have seen a bird-dog take notice of a fresh deer-track, and even run a deer by sight. But

with that matchless race of dogs whose business in life is to trail, jump, and run deer I have had dealings since boyhood. It is my hope here to give a careful account of the nature, behavior, and achievements of these sagacious creatures.

The deer-hound that I know is a lean, hungry, wavy-tailed, intelligent-eyed master of the chase. He is always famished. He is always skulking into the house, lying down in those places where he is most certain to be stepped on, gifted in setting up mighty howls when he is even slightly hurt, always capable of slipping a collar or getting out of a stockade, and withal the craftiest thief imaginable. Dual is his nature: he is the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of the canine world. At home he is usually a perfect nuisance, but in the woods he is superb. The plantation deer-hound falls far short as a social or decorative feature of the home; but he is grand in the chase. Although he is an awful cross to the hunter's wife, he is the hunter's delight. But perhaps, after all, he learned from human beings to show his worst side at home.

When I think of deer-hounds wonderful memories of the old days come to me. I think of the packs whose wild music made the lonely woods of

Santee resound. I think of certain famous pairs of dogs: of Check and Mate; of Gambler and Sportsman; of Drum and Fife; of Lead and Loud. I see the shimmering sunny thicket of green bays, the deer's favorite covert; I hear the slow trailing, which gradually warms as the chances for a real race develop; I see the high bound of the old stag as, with a single superb leap, he leaves his lair. His high bounding takes him clear of the thicket; he reaches the open pine-lands — a beautiful creature beginning a great race. His broad white tail is held stiffly erect; it jerks from side to side with the muscular movements of his haunches. His tall, chestnut-colored antlers outreach his stride. On and on he goes, floating buoyantly over obstacles, breasting brightly through patches of yellow broom-sedge, heading on through reaches of gallberry and huckleberry. And now the pack clamors out of the thicket and the wide pine-lands echo that melody that is sweetest to the woodsman's ears. Such memories!

But to have good deer-hunting a man should have trained hounds; and the matter of training a well-bred hound to the hunt is not difficult. The gist of the situation may be put in this way: a young hound is easy to start, but he may be

very hard to stop. As far as his trailing and jumping deer are concerned, a young hound is considered "made" when his first deer is shot before him; after that, it will not be necessary to persuade him to hunt. It is a serious piece of business to miss a deer in front of a dog that is taking his first lesson; for he is liable to be led to believe that the sound of the gun is a signal from the hunter that he must put on more steam and overhaul the deer in short order. This is bad: he may keep on the track for hours, and finally come home, not an ignorant dog exactly, but what is worse: a falsely educated dog, a dog with a wrong idea in his head. It is perhaps fair to consider a deer-hound's training finished when, the deer having eluded the standers, the hound responds to the horn and quickly returns to the master of the hunt. Some dogs, it is true, will never learn to do this; but others show great intelligence in the matter. I have had hounds that would pursue deer only five or ten minutes when they would return on the back-track. Such dogs are invaluable — this quality of faithful returning being worth more to the hunter than keenness of nose or fleetness of foot. Other hounds I have known acquired the habit of cut-

ting through the woods until they would strike the trail of the horses that the hunters had ridden. This scent they would follow on the forward track until they had rejoined the hunting party. I once owned a fine hound named Bugle, whose sole defect as a deer-hunter lay in the fact that he would quit running as soon as the deer had escaped the hunters, make in business-like fashion for the nearest pine-land road, and rapidly return to the plantation house. Repeatedly have I had to ride several miles in to the plantation to recover Bugle; but he was so well worth recovering that I never had the heart to be harsh with him when, after a hard chase to find him, I discovered him calmly and amiably dozing at home on the sunny side of the old rice-barn.

In dealing with hounds after deer probably the most important and difficult matter is to teach a dog to stop automatically from a wild and fruitless chase; or if he will not do this by instinct he must learn to come to call. This is doubly necessary: first, as has been said, if a dog gets away after a deer he may run indefinitely, thus terminating his usefulness for that day; then a deer in flight from a hound is sure to run through deer haunts, rousing and scattering the

game there assembled. A dog has frequently been known thus to spoil a whole day's sport. Once I saw a fast, undisciplined hound follow a lone old buck into a wilderness of deer-drives. When he returned about an hour later he had a collection of *eleven* deer before him; but he had mislaid the original stag. Deer that are started in such a crazy, haphazard fashion are liable to run almost anywhere, and the chances are indeed slim for the hunter to have a shot.

A hound's willingness to obey, even in the pitch of excitement, his master's injunction — his consent to forego the wolfish rapture of putting an old buck at top speed into the big timber — is less, I think, a matter of training than it is of character and temperament. A hound that has a very definite savage element in his nature can hardly be stopped or taught to stop, whereas a gentler dog will take easily to the necessary restrictions. In this matter a male dog is generally much harder to manage than a female, and a dog of common stock than one well bred. The cases of Lucy and Hickory will illustrate what is meant.

Lucy was a hound of unknown pedigree. I bought her from a poacher of the pine-lands be-

cause it hurts me to have so lawless a hunter own so matchless a dog; then, too, her beautiful head and the great intelligence that looked out of her large brown eyes appealed strongly to me. She was, as any good observer might perceive, a sensitive creature of delicate perceptions, and that is the kind of material out of which to make dogs that money cannot buy. I do not know that I ever taught Lucy anything about hunting; but what I learned from her was not a little. She was the kind of a dog — that delight to a hunter's heart! — that did best when permitted to have her own way. In the woods she simply appeared to anticipate everything that I wanted her to do. I can hear her now giving a gurgling series of joyous yelps and whines as the tuning-up of the horns announces that a deer-hunt is in prospect. I can see her now, following me down the dewy, pine-trashed plantation road, never once pausing on the seductive scents of raccoon, fox, opossum, or wildcat. And there were plenty of these; for on both sides of the road stretch fragrant dense thickets, deep swamplands, and far-reaching wildwoods. But Lucy was all deer-dog. If she came to a deer-track that had anything alive about it, she would stop, and that

long tail of hers would begin its high, expressive waving; but without my consent she would not follow the hottest scent. Whenever we found ourselves in good deer country — in low thickets of myrtle and sweet-bay, and in quiet stretches of huckleberry, or on the borders of woodland ponds — she was forever smelling on the bushes. This is a true deer-dog trait, ever to be admired. A hound that persists in traveling through bushes with his nose to the ground is more than likely a rabbit-hunter, or, to use a stock expression among the negroes of the Santee country, "a fine varmint dog." Of course, a cold-trailer keeps his nose to earth, as he should do in open woods; but a deer-scent will sometimes linger as long on damp bushes as it will on the ground, and the best deer-hounds invariably "travel high" in brush. The scent-pockets or glands on the inside of the knees on a deer's hind legs probably leave the scent by which deer commonly follow one another; and that this must be exceedingly pungent is proved by the readiness with which a good hound picks it up. Hunters who have closely observed the behavior of hounds trailing deer have noticed that their noses are lifted higher and higher as the hotness of the scent increases. I suspect that

they have an intense eagerness to view the game they are pursuing. Lucy's excitement at such a time showed in her head, her tail, her voice, and in the ever-increasing speed at which she would travel. And when she once started a deer he had to hoof it. There could be in front of her no dilly-dallying and rabbit-hopping and easy dodging such as might be practiced on a slow-poke hound. If she jumped a deer in a thicket she made it her business to bring him out in short order. But if she took the deer past the standers (and she always seemed to know exactly where we were) she would abandon the chase. By the time we had mounted our horses to move on to a new drive she would be with us again — eager, obedient, full of fine intelligence.

I hunted with Lucy for five years; and I can't remember having scolded her a single time. At last, when a negro poisoned her because I had been obliged (according to the law and custom of the land) to shoot his sheep-killing dog, there was homicide in my heart — and all of it is n't yet gone. Lucy, Lady Lucy, was the type of hound that makes the best traditions of deer-hunting.

Now, Hickory was a very different kind of a creature. He is not dead yet; and when I con-

sider some of the treatment that he has survived, doubts as to whether he will ever die arise in me. He has been clubbed and drubbed and mauled scores of times by various men who have owned him, but he has digested the bitterest medicine that all these physicians could administer. In size Hickory is a brute of a dog, and in color he is a tawny, shaggy gray. He is powerful and rangy; and the fierce independence of his disposition he must have inherited from wolfish ancestors. It is true that in some things he will listen to reason, is amenable to discipline; but in hunting the deer he is simply bound to have his own wild way. His character has strongly impressed the community in which he resides, and this impression is especially distinct among the negroes. Hickory had not been in my possession a week before I discovered that he seemed to be public property. First a negro came nine miles out of the pine-lands to borrow the dog.

"What do you want with him, Jason?" I asked.

"I hab a wild bull," he answered; "and I know yo' dog can ketch 'um."

The dog was permitted to go on this unusual mission and he speedily did the work required.

"He done scare all the meanness out o' dat bull," Jason reported when he returned Hickory.

Another negro borrowed him to catch a savage boar of Boggy Bay that had already killed three ordinary "ketch dogs," and had wounded and cowed as many more. The only trouble arising from employing Hickory for this kind of work was that he almost killed the boar.

At another time, at dusk in the evening I found a negro loafing near the plantation gateway, a quarter of a mile from the house. This made me suspicious.

"What is it you want?" I asked.

"I been waitin' to see you, Cap'n."

"Why did n't you come up to the house?"

"I ain't ready for die," my visitor laughingly answered. "I been here all day, sah, 'caze I hear dat Hickory ain't done tie up."

But perhaps I can best give you an adequate idea of this remarkable dog's character if I show you Hickory in action.

"Now, Prince," I will say to the best of negro hunters who can drive out deer-thickets even better than he can paddle a canoe in a freshet, "don't you let Hickory get away from you today."

"No, sah," Prince will lie amiably; for he knows very well that I am "passing the buck" to him, and he knows, too, from long experience, that he cannot manage that shaggy gray brute.

"Do you have the long rawhide lash ready for him and the halter-rope with the snapper to tie him up?"

"Yes, boss, I got 'um."

"Well, for goodness' sake, Prince, watch yourself to-day, and see that Hickory does n't play rings around you as he usually does."

In the first drive we jump a buck that we have been after for years, and he comes sneaking out a full mile ahead of the dogs. He is not in the least scared, and he takes his own time and his own course in coming. He looks bored at having to leave his warm bed in a bay-branch and at having to stop chewing the cud; but he is not worried. Unfortunately he runs out between the standers, and we watch him dodge, pause, and then softly skulk into a beautiful thicket not more than three hundred yards across the road on which we are standing. I know that he is going to stop there; and if only we can break off the dogs without too much fuss, we can surround the place and scalp the old rascal. But to handle the

dogs is going to take some skillful work, for the trail is hot, the dogs are fresh — and Hickory leads the pack! I can stop Lucy with a look, and the two puppies with a lifted switch — but Hickory!

Prince, although driving far away from us, knows that the buck has slipped past the standers. Soon his horse comes breaking rapidly through the branch. As soon as he is on the high ground he jumps off his mount and comes running toward me. He wants to know the buck's exact run so that he can post himself in front of the oncoming hounds. I motion for silence, give the deer's course, and point toward the dense thicket ahead where the "Old Miner" is at present stopping.

"I'll take care of all the rest, Prince; but, for the love of Heaven, you stop that Hickory. Kill him if necessary, but don't let him pass you."

I can afford to be serious in this; for I know that a broadside of Princes could not kill Hickory.

Here they come! Lucy's grieving tenor is ringing high and true. The two black-and-tan puppies are chiming in with happy urchin yelps, with now and then a comical squeal of pain as one of them runs his head against a snag or

A Group photographed by Flash-Light

(*Note the two albinos*)

catches his tail on the thorns of a huge swamp briar. But Hickory? Oh, no; he does n't open. He is n't that kind at all. On strictly business matters of this nature he is as shut-mouthed as a clam. Occasionally he might tongue negligently on a cold trail, but never on the track of a freshly roused deer; for he seems to know that noise will lessen his chances of overhauling his quarry. It always seemed to me that this huge dog, with a strange kind of silent and savage grimness, simply set out purposefully to catch his deer. Now he is running like a famished timber wolf that has sighted a defenseless and fleeing fawn. He is streaking it like lightning as his flying gray bulk suddenly emerges from the edge of the swamp. He is far ahead of the other dogs. He is a terrible fellow, this Hickory. I am tempted to help Prince with the business on hand; for a glance at his face has failed to reveal to me that high degree of fortitude and self-confidence that is necessary to stop the howling hurricane that is heading for him. But if I forsake my own post, Lucy and the pups will pass me — gently, but quite effectively. Therefore I merely give Prince a fiendish look (meant fiercely to convey faith in him and assurance that he will do his part in

treating Hickory roughly), gesture at him ferociously — and then leave him to his fate.

Exactly what follows I am not permitted to watch, for Lucy and the pups are now fast coming over the pine-land hillock. But I catch the thing out of the corner of a wary eye; and truly 't is heart-breaking to see it come off. The negro has the formidable lash whirling in manful circles, and the expression on his face closely resembles that of a head-hunting demon in one of Jack London's Philippine Island stories. I had warned him not to shout at Hickory for fear that the big buck, whose ears, I knew, would be peeled and a-quiver for just such a sound, would hear him and make off. On our part, therefore, the whole business was a dumb-show. And it was quickly over.

Prince made two wild grabs at the huge dog flying past him, and then he pitched headlong against a pine-log. Lucy and the pups halted at my mere quiet command, and they were soon in leash. But by that time Hickory was on the borders of that beautiful thicket that harbored the buck. I looked remorsefully at Prince.

"He ran over you and trampled you, did n't he, Prince?"

The good-natured, dusky woodsman grinned.

"Cap'n," he protested, "dat kind of a dog ain't meant to be stopped."

His answer seemed to me sound philosophy.

Just at that moment the old buck and Hickory emerge from the bay-thicket, and we are afforded a brief view of the race. Never before in his crafty long life has that stag had business so urgent calling him instanter to other parts; and the grim and silent hound at his heels surely stretches the lean old champion racer of the pine-lands to the cyclone pitch of his speed.

Such a contrast of temperaments as that afforded by Lucy and Hickory should give a fair idea of the very great differences observable in the character and the behavior of deer-hounds. I shall now, to illustrate another difference in hounds, recount briefly the story of the great stag of Pinckney Run.

In the early autumn of 1916 this magnificent buck was shot down on the edge of Pinckney Run, one of the best deer-drives in the Santee country, and celebrated as such since the days of the Revolution. The stag was brought to earth by Ed Lincoln, as famous a deer-hunter as our

plantation region can boast. When the stag was on the ground the other members of the hunting party quickly gathered round. They were five in number. One of these took hold of the buck's hind feet in order to stretch him across a log in order that his slayer might cut his throat. All this time the great creature was struggling, but apparently in his last efforts. And all this time the pack of hounds, no fewer than fourteen strong, went wild around the fallen monarch. Ed's knife was dull and the neck of the buck was like a bull-hide. The hunter sawed helplessly. This the old stag did not relish; therefore in a sudden grand effort he kicked loose from his holder, threw Ed (who had been sitting astride his neck) over his head, and incontinently made a wild break for liberty. Some of the hunters were too amazed to shoot. The two who shot were apparently too surprised over the amazing performance of the big animal to hit him. All thought that, of course, the fourteen dogs would pull him down within a hundred yards. But they clamored vainly on the slot. The buck ran nearly five miles straight through the pine-lands, he jumped the high wire fence of the Santee Club preserve, he ran through the far-extending pre-

serve, and at sundown was lost to the dogs in the lonely marshes of Murphy's Island.

Until I met that hunting party returning I never clearly understood the meaning of the word *crestfallen.* And I shall never forget what my father, who for more than fifty years has hunted in those regions, said when the story was told him. I was emphasizing to him the severe wounds of the stag and the great size of the pack.

"There is n't one good dog among them," he said. "One good dog would have caught him. Rowley would have caught him."

This Rowley was a large black-and-white deer-hound of English stock that we had on the plantation for many years. On a hunt he was a superb and masterful creature; and we had a custom of relying on him to overhaul a wounded deer. He had one trait that was unusual: if he pulled down a deer or if he reached a fallen deer before the hunters, it was impossible for a man safely to approach the quarry without first arranging to drop a noose over the dog's head and then pull him off the deer and tie him up. I remember killing a splendid buck one day — a buck that ran a half-mile after being shot. When I reached him Rowley was standing up on the

deer's body, and the moment he saw me he bristled up and snarled savagely. He meant business, too. All my efforts to approach him were met menacingly. In the end I was obliged to go back home, get a rope, return, lasso the implacable hound, and pull him off. At most other times this dog was of a gentle and affectionate disposition; but when he felt that he had made a kill, ancient instincts returned, and forthwith he became a dangerous customer. I may add that the average hound that overhauls a deer will, if the hunters do not find him, take a meal before he will return home. More than once I have found deer by tying up a full-bellied hound for a day, and then by returning to the woods with him in leash. He would, of course, make straight for the spot where he had enjoyed his latest dinner.

There are conditions under which hounds will catch unwounded deer. This is a curious and interesting subject, and I have taken great pains to collect data on it. And the material so gathered has come from some of the most reliable deer-hunters in the Santee country. All testify to the fact that a deer can be caught, or at least brought to bay, by good hounds, if the most favorable conditions prevail. The chief of these conditions

are the following: warm weather, the deer fat rather than lean, the deer unused to be run, the dog or dogs sticking to the track of the same deer, the dogs having good bottom. Leaving the fawn out of the question, an old fat buck is probably the easiest deer to catch. This may be contrary to general opinion, but I am merely relating what experience has, in our region of the South, recorded. The heavy horns of a mature buck tell on him in a long race, for their weight is considerable; moreover, his hoofs are sometimes a good deal worn and they become tender in a hard chase. He is more likely, too, than a young deer to try skulking and craftiness before the dogs; and with these tactics he loses out in front of a strong pack. If a buck thinks he has taken the measure of the dogs after him he will quickly come to bay, or will simply stop now and then to menace and to beat off his pursuers. I shall never forget the behavior of a certain old stag in this regard.

My brother and I had been hunting with two half-grown puppies, when this stag, a large and very handsome one, was started. He appeared almost at once to sense the nature of the dogs after him. These he scorned. About every three

hundred yards of a leisurely chase he would deliberately stop and browbeat the pups into giving him a decent chance to catch his breath! All this happened in the open pine-lands; and as I was following this traveling circus I could see something of what happened. The day's being a warm one had something to do with the buck's unwillingness to be pushed hard. However, if the white-tail has half a chance he prefers to play in front of dogs, to dodge, to hide and slip along, rather than to run wildly and at great distances. In the region which I am describing I am persuaded that each deer has a very limited range, and that it is loath (especially when in danger) to go far from home. It is entirely familiar with woods in which it has been bred, and it usually prefers to take a chance dodging about in them. Even if run a long distance by hounds a deer will nearly always return to the haunts with which it is acquainted — this behavior resembling that of a rabbit, except that the deer takes a wider orbit. Indeed, a rabbit playing in front of dogs and returning on its tracks is a genuine miniature white-tail.

For going directly to the arduous business of catching a deer, the most extraordinary dog of my

acquaintance was one owned and trained by Pinckney Combahee, a renowned hunter of the pine-lands. This dog was deliberately taught to catch deer. He was a cross between a strain of very fleet redbone hounds and a highly bred pointer. He had the speed and accuracy of the bird-dog, and the nose and persistence and endurance of the hound. To my own personal knowledge this remarkable dog caught "single-handed" seven unwounded bucks. It was his habit to tongue on the trail except for the last mile or so of the race, when he would fly over the ground with silent intensity. Of the deer that he overhauled it is only fair to them to say that they were fat bucks which, in the warm days of the early autumn, had wandered out of the wilds of Wambaw Swamp. Because of their not having been run much they were probably not in the best *training*. It may be added that if a deer in flight ever drops foamy slaver, the following hounds will go wild on the track, redoubling all their efforts to overtake him. Nor, after such a sign of the fugitive's weakening, is he ever likely to escape; and the dogs appear to understand very well the nature of his plight.

When good hounds are after a deer, mere flight

is no assurance of safety. The best defense or refuge that the pursued creature has is water; and he knows this. Indeed, so perfectly is he aware of the effectiveness of this barrier against trail-followers that he often enters a daytime haunt *via* the water route. In the Southern deer country there are many long stretches of watery thickets, through which deer can travel without leaving much scent except on the bushes. No white-tail deer — at least of the mental persuasion of those found in the old plantation regions — hesitates to take the water, and when wounded or hotly pursued, this is the most natural thing for a deer to do. Often I have known bucks to swim the Santee where its width is greatest, and at least one buck of my acquaintance started, during the mating season, across a bay several miles wide. He was nearly two miles offshore when overhauled by a launch. Only rarely does a deer come to bay except in water; if he does, there is likely no water near

In water a bayed deer has a decided advantage over dogs. So successfully can he defend himself that, if he is not too sorely wounded and if hunters do not come up, he will get the better of the pack, will probably put some of them out

of commission in no gentle fashion, and may effect his escape. In this kind of a duel with dogs a buck uses his antlers very little. He menaces the hounds with them; but the real work is done with his front feet shod with their keen, hard hoofs. A doe is especially vicious in the use of her feet as striking weapons. I have seen scores of deer brought thus to bay. Let us look at the behavior of a few of them.

A ten-point buck had been shot in the shoulder. He ran a hundred yards with three good dogs after him. Coming to bay in a shallow pond about an acre in area, he ran out until the depth of the water in which he stood would force a dog to swim to reach him. A deer seems to be able nicely to adjust this depth. As I rode up the foremost hound was swimming straight for the buck. He swam eagerly and boldly; but that was because he was a young dog and knew no better. Before I could call him out of danger the alert and angry buck, with a viciously swift stroke of his forefoot, had struck the hound and had sent him completely under water. He came up groggy. The two old hounds were warier. They swam in, and the clamor they made was entirely adequate to the situation; but they did little but

clamor. They had diplomas from the school of experience. The appearance of the buck meanwhile was truly ferocious; and there is something awesome about the fury of a creature that is naturally shy and gentle. The head of this old bayed stag was held at a dangerous angle, his eyes were darting light, and he had ruffed so much of his hair forward that his size appeared doubled. Knowing that I could shoot the deer if he made a break, I carefully watched the performance of the hounds. It was not courageous. Most hunting-dogs have the weakness of supposing that much fatuous barking helps along the business of baying game. Perhaps it does somewhat confuse and irritate a bayed stag, thus permitting a crafty dog to swim in behind him. The young hound had now come ashore and was trying to lick a wound on the back of his neck. The old dogs appeared baffled. They did much swimming and barking, but they kept their distance. At last I rode down to the shore, when the buck turned and bounded out of the water. Before he had gone thirty yards the young dog, by racing alongside, had made a fortunate leap for his throat and had thrown him headlong. The three dogs, fearless now that the buck was clear of the

water, crowded him; and they held him until my coming ended his struggles.

At another time, while hunting with an old stager of a hound, I crippled a large spike buck. He made for water, reached it safely, and swam boldly out into the big and deep pond that he had gained. The dog, following fast and apparently without apprehension, overhauled the buck far out in deep water. For some minutes they just circled each other; and now that both of them were swimming, the dog appeared as able to handle himself as the deer. Finally the hound, by a feint and then a sudden shrewd lunge, caught the buck by the ear. Whether designedly or not the deer's head was thus held under water, and he was quickly drowned.

While dogs readily follow deer into small bodies of water, they are by no means so ready to tackle a big creek or a river. Especially in the regions of which I write there are dangers for dogs in all fresh waters of any considerable size; for the grim bull alligator lurks, and a lover of hound-dogs is he. This cold-blooded monster finds no meal quite so delicious as that afforded by a good hound. Many a hunter of the pinelands has grieved for his favorite dog and in

vain has waited for him to come home, because he has gone to cram the voracious maw of this cruel and secret killer. It is said that an alligator will not readily attack a buck, however merciless he may be toward other deer and creatures which come to the edges of his haunted domains to drink. I have never known a mature deer to be attacked by this savage saurian. Possibly the deer's antlers and sharp hoofs inspire among other wild creatures a certain respect.

One of the most curious instances of the behavior of hounds after deer the following incident describes. On a Christmas hunt a very fine eight-point stag was wounded, having one of his forelegs broken. Despite this handicap he kept, for more than a mile, his distance in front of a good pack of hounds. Running northward from where he had been jumped, as if he had the whole design of his escape clearly planned, he made his way through the dense thickets of pine, myrtle, and holly on Wambaw Plantation, and forthwith plunged into Wambaw Creek. Had he ever placed that barrier between us it is doubtful if we should ever have seen him again. But a strange mishap awaited him. His big antlers, which had a rather unusual pitch forward, were

securely caught by a strong grapevine that swung down in a loop low over the water. The big vine took him just below the brow-tines; and although he could swim off a little distance, the grapevine would then stay his progress and pull him back. This was what was happening when we rode up. The dogs were wildly clamoring; some were in the water and some bayed from the bank. It was a curious and interesting situation. As the buck was large and well antlered, we dispatched him before we drew him ashore. His horns, though hard, had had some of the beading so effectively rubbed off that the telling of the story never failed to be impressive when the listener could be shown the marked antlers of this fine stag, which we always called "the Grapevine Buck."

On one other occasion I saw a buck get into trouble with his horns; and these instances are worth recording, for every deer-hunter will testify to the fact that one of the most remarkable powers of a stag is his ability to handle his horns in dense brush. While hunting on Doe Hall a very fine stag was driven by the hounds out to the road and straight for a stander. On some pines bordering the road there were looped up

some strands of telephone-wire, the regular supports of which had been blown down in a recent gale. The buck, not noticing the wires, ran into them, and his horns became fast to this curious obstruction. The stander, meanwhile, fired both barrels at point-blank range at the *tied* and struggling buck. A moment later, and just in time to clear himself from the approaching pack, the stag cleared himself, almost ran over the badly bewildered stander, and made good his remarkable escape into the wilds of Wambaw Swamp.

This account of the deer and the hound will be brought to a close by a description of the strange behavior of a pack of hounds in the presence of a tame buck of mine. This buck I had raised on a bottle. He had been an interesting pet; and, aside from eating all the geraniums and playfully pushing over the pots with his horns, with an occasional trip into the garden, where he cleaned up all in sight that was succulent, he had not given much trouble. Until he had been properly introduced (this matter took some weeks), the hounds had been kept in a stockade. Finally, when they were released they took small notice of the deer; indeed, all that year their attitude toward him was properly tame and disinterested.

It was really the buck that started the fun; and this happened when he was a year and a half old and had sharp spike horns. Of his new adornment he was inordinately vain. In the early autumn I began to notice that the buck had begun to "pick on" the dogs. When they would be blamelessly dozing in the sun, he would bow his head, swell his neck, roll his eyes, and come stalking toward them with a gait that had something of the ridiculous German goosestep in it. He would blow out his breath in scornful superiority. This odd and truculent behavior increased until the hounds took notice of it. But if one of them got up the buck would start away, either frightened or pretending to be. Then one day a hound started after him, and a slow race began. This little chase was merely the prelude; for after a time, when the whole pack would fall in after the fleeing deer, there was all the earnestness of a real struggle for supremacy in speed. The business might end in a few minutes, or it might extend itself over an hour or more. The chase sometimes passed the wide bounds of the plantation. But always on returning to the house, both the pursuers and the pursued agreed that the game was at an end. It was a pretty

sight to watch this remarkable sort of a race, and to see its strange and peaceful ending.

But one day I brought home a new hound that knew nothing of the playful tactics of so innocent a recreation; and by mischance I forgot the proper caution. In a short time one of the customary chases was on. I paid no attention to it until I noticed that it was lasting a very long time. Then I saw the buck, plainly tired, race by the rice-barn, and then keep on racing. Close after him pressed the new dog, while the pack clamored somewhat shamefacedly in the rear. When my attempt to stop the dog failed, things looked bad. The best old hound broke off his running, and he appeared curiously waiting for something to do. What this was I was soon to see. In fifteen minutes back came the excited, straining, and pitiful buck, a hopeless expression on his face. The grim pursuer was not fifteen yards behind him. I had a club ready for the newcomer, but my attentions to him were not needed. The old dog, who had apparently dropped out on purpose, waylaid the stranger, and there ensued a royal dog-fight. It gave me a chance to collar and to tie up the dangerous hound; and this naturally ended the chase. I have always thought

that the strategic manner in which that wise old hound befriended the distressed buck showed more reasoning power than instinct. And whenever I think of the deer and the hound, I like to remember that sagacious old fellow who had the sense to recognize the difference between a regular hunt and a mere game, and who properly regulated his behavior accordingly.

CHAPTER XI

A UNIQUE QUAIL HUNT

We were just about halfway through our plantation Christmas dinner, which is no mean kind of an entertainment, when a negro bearing a note for me shuffled to the door. I took the letter and read its brief contents. A friend in the city was having a house-party of a dozen guests. As yet they had enjoyed no game. Would it be possible for me to secure and dispatch immediately about twenty-five or thirty quail? The writer assured me that I knew where the birds were, and all that; and that he would not trouble me, but that he knew how much I should enjoy getting the bag for him. But unless they could be put on the mail Christmas night they would arrive too late for the aforesaid purpose. Gentle reader, have you ever had a friend who knew nothing of hunting ask you to get game for him? He thinks he is conferring a privilege on you; for he honestly believes that on a big plantation shooting quail is just like picking cotton, and bagging a wild turkey is just like going out into

the garden and cutting off a cabbage — just like that!

But this friend of mine, however uninformed on some matters, is a man whom I like to please; therefore during the remainder of the dinner I was honestly planning how I might accommodate his wishes. To do this would, in the first place, require quick work, for the sun was hardly two hours high. Moreover, to another friend I had lent my only bird-dog for a Christmas-Day hunt. Unless a man has two or three coveys of quail shooed into a coop, and has the lid clamped down over them, how is he going to produce them suddenly at a friend's mere wish? But in hunting as in most things it pays to try.

Leaving the rest of the company discussing juleps and the like, I emerged from the house just before the sun had begun to burn the tall pines to the westward of the plantation. Seeing several little negro boys who had already had a share of dinner, I impressed them into my service. We crossed the cotton-fields, heading toward a long stretch of broom-sedge that bordered the creek. In this dense yellow grass there are always quail, but to find them without a dog would be difficult; yet there were my dusky

henchmen to help. Pausing once to look the situation over, I heard, coming from a far edge of the field, where an extraordinarily high tide had begun to back the water into the grass, the carrying-on of two coveys of quail that had run into each other. The voluble gossip that they were engaging in was sweet music to my ears. And there was little lost motion in my getting to where the birds were.

Telling my small trailers to stand close behind me so as to give me a chance to shoot, I began walking up the birds. They must have been having for themselves some kind of a Christmas festival or dinner-party, for they were as loath to rise as some friends I had just left had been unwilling to leave the table. I never saw birds rise so scatteringly; not if I live until the League of Nations or the millennium or something like that comes off, do I expect to see more quail in one place. I said that two coveys had come together. That was all wrong. The thing I am telling is a true thing; and when I say that, standing almost in one place, with birds rising almost continuously, I was enabled to kill eleven birds "on the rise," you will understand what kind of a camp-meeting I had invaded. Nor did

the birds, even after much shooting, fly wildly. They must have been too deeply engrossed with social engagements to consider me. From the grassy edges where I had flushed them they swung to the left, settling about in the tall broom-grass on a little hillock that rose softly from the dead level of the old field.

The little negroes retrieved all the shot birds, and we now began to walk up the scattered ones. The sun was down behind the pines now; and the brightly lighted sky gave most excellent visibility. To walk up these fine birds and to have them go whirring off toward the fading sunset afforded me as fine an opportunity for quail-shooting as I have ever enjoyed. The crippled birds were gathered in for me by the small boys, who performed very creditably. They also carried the game, so that all I had to do was to flush the birds and shoot.

They were not followed for the third rise, both because they were by that time widely scattered, and because, on pausing to count heads, I discovered, to my surprise, that we had twenty-eight. They would be enough. The house-party would be supplied. Nor, strange to say, had the matter in this instance been much more

difficult than picking cotton. I got the birds off on the mail that night, and learned later that they had arrived in time to render festive the occasion for which they had been gathered in.

There remains, perhaps, a word concerning the remarkable size of this bunch of birds that it was my good fortune to encounter. I have seen at other times coveys numbering as many as thirty-five or forty birds, and these undoubtedly consisted of two or more bevies that had come together. My accounting for this particular covey is this: that on account of the very high water prevailing in the creek, which had flooded the marshes and bottom-lands, two coveys, possibly three, that had been used to roosting in the marsh, had come late in the afternoon to the broom-sedge field, and there had met another covey. They were discussing the situation when I heard them; and the fact that they realized that their regular haunts were flooded kept most of them in the broom-grass. In all, the hunt was a unique one, not the least interesting feature of which being my new type of retriever that proved his worth on that memorable occasion.

CHAPTER XII

WILD FOWL OF THE DELTA

Among those happenings of nature that are calculated peculiarly to impress the thoughtful mind none is more interesting and picturesque than the annual southward migration of our wild water fowl. I mention this rather than the northward migration in the spring because I wish to give as accurate a picture as possible of one of the southern resorts to which these swift-winged, wise-headed folk repair when the autumn sets in. What they have done for centuries untold the American people are now beginning to do. Call it instinct in the wild fowl if you will, but it is an instinct pregnant with fundamental sagacity.

The southward movement of game birds begins with the flight of the upland plover in midsummer. But these birds have a long journey, for they spend the winter on the pampas of the Argentine and on some of the plains of Patagonia. Woodcock often begin to move slowly southward as the summer wanes. But the first striking migration is the flight of the reed-birds.

They answer also to the names of bobolinks, rice-birds, and ortolans. Toward the end of August these yellow-clad hosts begin to march down toward the ripening rice-fields of the South. Many linger in the North and East during September and even to early October, but the migration proper comes earlier. After these birds follow the coots, various shore birds, the several species of rails, and then the ducks and geese. How fast and how far they follow depends chiefly on the weather, but in ordinary seasons the migration has been completed by the first of December. By that time the winter haven of which I speak has gathered to its warm and ample bosom its wild children. Those who come later are stragglers.

One home to which they gather is the region which is embraced by the delta of the Santee River on the South Carolina coast. Its coastal width is roughly from Cape Romain on the south to the mouth of Winyah Bay on the north — a distance of about sixteen miles. Such is, in large, the fronting of the delta on the ocean. Its hinterland penetrates to a depth of about fifteen miles, though northwest of this arbitrary limit are swamps and endless water-courses whereto the

ducks of the delta occasionally repair. At about fifteen miles back from its mouth the river divides into a north and south branch, which flow almost parallel to each other to the coast. The land between these two branches, which varies in width from one to three miles, is the delta proper, although the marshes and lowlands bordering both sides of the two rivers are considered as parts of the same region. At the end of the delta proper is Cedar Island, a heavily wooded stretch of shoreland, remote and wild. On it are brackish marshes and ponds where wild fowl gather in myriads. These ponds are shallow and sheltered, and I know of no place to which ducks more constantly resort. Southward across the south branch of the Santee and cut off from the mainland by Alligator Creek is Murphy's Island, a typical coastal island of the South Atlantic seaboard. It is several square miles in area, is wooded like the other island mentioned, and contains brackish ponds and sloughs frequented by wild fowl. The woods of this island contain herds of wild cattle and wild goats as well as white-tail deer.

Offshore from the mouths of the river is Bird Bank, a long, low sandbar covered by high tides.

To this singular place, when the sun is bright and the sea calm, the ducks flock by thousands. Observers who have hidden in barrels in the sand to watch the coming of the quacking hosts have told me that the bar is literally covered, while the warm salt waters about it are dotted with "rafts" of mallards, teals, widgeons, and black ducks. If the day is stormy the ducks stay in sheltered ponds of the islands or in the thousands of miniature sanctuaries in the delta.

This whole stretch of delta country was once planted to rice, and had an intricate and admirable system of canals and ditches for controlling the water on the rice-fields. Rice-planting has practically been abandoned in that section of the country, and the fields have gone to waste and are now grown to wampee, duck-oats, wild rice, and other aquatic plants. The ditches, through the constant dredging of the tides, have in many cases not only remained, but have been widened and deepened until some of them are more like small creeks than ditches. Sheltered by overhanging marsh and jutting mud-banks, they are ideal day resorts for ducks. When the tide is high the wide fields are flooded and the savanna-like depressions between the clumps of marsh are

filled with ducks of many kinds. If the weather is windy and cold they remain all day in the ditches and fields; otherwise they go to the islands or out to sea. Invariably they return to the fields to spend the night. The time of their return depends on the stage of the tide. They come in at twilight if the tide is high then; if not, they come in when they know that their night haunts will have the proper depth of water.

While the ducks thus move about over the delta, traveling fifteen or twenty miles in as many minutes to get a meal or a lazy place in which to drowse, the wide marsh fields are full of life of a less restless sort. There are melancholy great blue herons, making the day silent with their immovability — their watchful waiting — and the night hideous with their raucous, guttural calls. There are Worthington marsh-wrens, flitting about with gay impudence. Purple gallinules are there, and Wayne's small clapper rails. The king rail is perhaps the most interesting bird of these marshes, found here in the winter in great numbers. If a man wishes to see Wilson's snipe he should visit this place, for he will never forget the sight of flocks of these swift-winged

game birds with their darting speed and incisive calls. There is a high, sandy mound in the delta not more than an acre in area. Once in a time of flood, when all the surrounding region was submerged, I found that myriads of wild creatures flocked to this refuge. The rails, the rabbits of the lowlands, and the raccoons took care of themselves in the tops of bushes, in low trees, and on floating masses of sedge on the borders of the island; but the Wilson's snipe came to the highland. I do not wish to be classed with Ananias, but I know there were thousands of snipe on that little space. They rose like the largest flocks of shore birds, but with that indescribable alertness in springing and surety of choosing their zigzag direction of flight that is so characteristic of this species. As I sat by a fire in a shack, on the tiny hummock I heard for a long while the sharp cries from thousands of long-billed wanderers seeking a place on which to alight. All through the next day I watched this extraordinary congregation of snipe, and I am sure that before the waters began to subside the following night the hummock must have been visited by many thousands of these birds.

The most characteristic bird of the marshes

is the red-winged blackbird. During the winter, when the native birds are joined by the hosts which have migrated from the North, it is no uncommon thing to see flocks of several thousand individuals. Rusty blackbirds consort with the red-wings, and occasionally purple grackles and boat-tailed grackles are found with them. The planters along the delta who have a little rice stacked in the open will be sure to have black clouds of these birds descending to their very doors and over their fields.

Certain species of ducks winter in this region, and these are some that have been observed in the Santee delta: mallard, black duck, baldpate or widgeon, canvasback, wood duck, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, shoveller, hooded merganser, American merganser, buffle-head, ruddy duck, blackhead, American golden-eye, scaup duck, redhead, pintail, ring-necked, old squaw, and the surf scoter.

Of these the mallard, the black duck, and the two kinds of teal are the most common. The canvasback is rare, as is also the American merganser. The ruddy duck is seldom seen, and whenever seen is killed. It is a singularly foolish or a strangely trustful little creature, for it seldom

takes wing until a boat has approached within forty yards of it.

The only duck mentioned that nests here is the wood duck. Occasionally, to be sure, other ducks that have not migrated because of wounds or temporary sickness mate and rear broods on the marshlands of the delta. But in the fresh-water ponds and lagoons in the pine-woods adjacent to the river, there are ideal nesting-sites for the wood duck. The bird sometimes makes its nest in the crotch of a tree growing in the water, usually a cypress or a black gum. Occasionally it nests in a hollow, in deserted holes of the pileated woodpecker. From nine to sixteen eggs are laid, and the young, almost as soon as hatched, are hustled into the water, where, when only a few days old, they disport themselves with a sort of elfin surety that is beautiful to watch. In this region the wood duck is increasing. Lately I have seen a flock of forty in a small pond. One afternoon I counted upward of three hundred passing above the delta to feeding-grounds in the swamps. There really should be a closed season everywhere on this most exquisite of American game birds.

Occasionally wild geese and swans come to the

Santee delta, but their migration route lies to the westward, and those that winter on the lower Santee are stragglers. They are rather common in the Carolinas and in Georgia. During the winter of 1918 I had the privilege of observing at close range what was probably the largest flock of Canada geese that ever stopped on the delta. I was duck-shooting, with a negro paddling me through the marshes. As we neared the river, which at that point is half a mile wide, we heard the loud honking across the delta. Looking back we saw geese coming, flying very low. They passed within one hundred yards, cleared the marsh-tops, and alighted in a stately squadron on the river in front of us. We were not observed, as we had pulled the canoe under a canopy of marsh. Both of us were curious to see the behavior of the big birds. There were fifty-six in the flock, and all seemed of one size save a very old gander that kept by himself and seldom ceased his strident honking. Once on the water the geese segregated themselves into small flocks, numbering about fifteen each; and I could not help wondering if these divisions did not represent families that naturally hung together. For the most part these geese busied themselves with

a very ardent preening that they seemed thoroughly to enjoy there in the wintry sunshine. When at last I told my paddler to push out on the river the old gander rose first; and soon the inevitable V-shaped battalion formed itself. The geese rose very high, taking a northward direction. Had it been spring I should have said that they were heading for Saskatchewan; but as it was only January I knew that they would go but a few miles up the river. There are depths of the great Santee swamp north of us that have never been penetrated by man; and wild creatures can live and die there without ever being molested by human enemies.

This delta is a very pleasant resort for wild fowl, but nowhere under natural surroundings are wild creatures freed from enemies. Most wild life belongs either to the pursuer class or to the class pursued. In nature might makes right; or at least might triumphs. The enemies that these wild fowl of the Santee delta encounter are many, and of these, formerly, the worst was the negro hunter. Pushing about in his dugout cypress canoe, which was hardly visible, he took heavy toll of ducks. White men, also, made it their business to kill ducks for the market. But legis-

lation, and the passing of most of the lands on the delta into the hands of a good sportsman's club, have stopped this kind of pot-hunting. While sportsmen bag many ducks they do not follow the game constantly as does the market hunter.

After man, the enemy of which wild fowl stand most in dread is the bald eagle. This great bird is found in numbers on the wide delta and on the lonely coastal islands, and, during the winter, appears to prefer wild duck to any other food. Being indolent of disposition he catches a crippled duck if there is one to be had; and will take every dead duck that a hunter leaves in the marsh. But when occasion demands he can exert his majestic self. I have seen no more impressive sight than the spectacle of a full-grown eagle taking his toll of a mighty concourse of mallards.

At daybreak one December morning I was at a blind near Cane Gap, two miles from the mouth of the North Santee. Between my stretch of the river and the mouth of the same, between Cedar Island on the south and Ford's Point on the north, the "big ducks" — mallards and black ducks — were rafted. All were not in one flock; but in all the flocks there must have been

fifty thousand ducks, and in single rafts there were several thousand. Just before the sun rose a great bald eagle launched himself out in flight from a lonely pine on Cedar Island, where he had spent the night. Three times he wheeled above the woods on the island; then he turned his course northward. The ducks, I am sure, saw him sooner than I did, and began to rise as soon as they were aware of his approach. The roar of their wings was so loud and continuous that it drowned the low booming of the surf. With a mastery of flight and an entire indifference to the consternation that he was causing, the huge eagle beat his way onward. He was looking for the mallard he wanted. Finally, from a small flock that was hurrying westward up the river he seemed to select one — an old mallard drake. The doomed bird was coming up toward Cane Gap. The eagle, always keeping above him, was hot on the track. The duck was flying wildly; but the eagle, with indolent ease, gained steadily. When about a hundred yards from me the eagle, then almost above the duck, suddenly swerved downward, turning over in its descent until it was under its prey. By a movement so quick that my eye could not follow it the talons of the great bird

had been buried in the breast of the mallard. A moment later, by a masterly maneuver, the eagle had regained his poise, and, rising slowly, beat his burdened way off over the marsh. Far, far, through the rosy morning I watched the lone and lordly eagle pursue his flight until lost to my limited vision in his larger liberty.

Wildcats, raccoons, and minks take but few birds. The delta of the Santee is a favorite winter resort for these aquatic birds; and they appear to be increasing there. Nor are they eager to leave when the mystic premonition of the approach of spring comes to them. Sometimes I have started big flocks of mallards in the delta even in late March, when all the cypresses are in a mist of tender green. I believe that a mallard can travel from the mouth of the Santee to the mouth of the St. Lawrence in a single night. Such speed seems prodigious, but the speed and the endurance of a wild creature depend generally on what is after it; and in the case of the wild fowl we are considering grim Winter is after them when they go southward; and love and mating are before them when they journey northward. They are, we may say, driven to the South, and are lured back to the North.

CHAPTER XIII

MY WINTER WOODS

As I reached the plantation gate I heard the first note of the winter's morning: a timid phœbe bird, always fairy-like and eerie, from a shadowy copse beside the road gave a plaintive call. I looked behind me, across the misty cotton-fields, now brown and bowed, that stretched back toward the house. In the east there was a whitening of the sky's arch; and set in it, in a space breathed clear by the wind that blows before the dawn, throbbed and glittered the morning star. The note of the phœbe, the shy woodland fragrances awaft from the great avenue before me, the mantle of mist on the cotton, the blazing star, and even the bulk and blackness of the live-oak grove were elements of a type of beauty that I had loved since boyhood. But for the delicate bird-note there was silence. It was the witching hour; and I was on the threshold of my winter woods.

These are the woods in which I was born and where the greater part of my life has been spent.

As I go through the gate, with the glimmer of morning resting with mystical beauty on all things, I am at home, even in the dark and solitary live-oak avenue into which I now pass.

Overhead the vast tops of these great trees shut out the sky, while far and wide their deep-foliaged limbs extend. In the cool, vaulted space under the oaks of this avenue there is ever an ancient, sequestered peace. From such old titans great limbs, larger than the bodies of ordinary trees, extend outward and upward, until, passing the limbs of the neighboring oaks, they lose themselves in the shadowy merging and melting of gray moss and silvery foliage. Sometimes, over their monumental frames, vast networks of vines have clambered, lowering down, even in the winter, heavy tapestries of jasmine foliage starred with yellow blooms. In the dampness and the fecund atmosphere of these woodland cathedrals, many kinds of mosses and lichens grow; and often the limbs of the live-oaks will be green or gray or brown — the color of the delicate plants which cling to and clothe the vast dimensions of these tolerant giants. Under such a canopy of moss and foliage both barred and great horned owls find a congenial home.

Amid ordinary woodland surroundings owls hoot at twilight and at night only; but in a live-oak avenue they can be heard giving their weird chorus when the sun is high overhead. These strange birds interpret well one aspect of live-oaks: they seem the veritable oracles of these dim old trees.

As I come out of the avenue the sun is rising and the wide pine-lands lie before me. All the copses are shimmering; the dewdrops glint on the tips of the pine-needles; from the thickets of myrtle and bay come fragrances that mingle with the spiceries from the pines. The most characteristic feature of these woods is the prevalence of the evergreens. Everywhere, forming glimmering vistas, fairy outlooks on the far and the alluring, fabulous cathedral aisles, solemn transepts, the pines prevail. After all, despite the undergrowth and despite the live-oaks behind or the water-courses grown with gum and tupelo before, this is a pine forest, and through it one can travel more than fifty miles in all directions save that which leads to the sea; and even then the pines march down to the very beach.

I do not go far into the pine-land on this win-

ter's morning before I come to a turpentine still, where the work of the day is beginning. I hear the songs of the negroes as they roll barrels or cram the little wood-burning engine with fuel. The spiciest of scents are exhaled from the shining vats. I know the cooper at the still; so I approach his little shed, which stands under a small, gnarled live-oak. There is no more incorrigible optimist in the world than such a man. All day long the sturdy chopping of his broad-axe and the tuneful tattoo of his mallet can be heard above the shouts of the mule-drivers and the creaking roll of the full barrels as they are shoved up the gangway of the still. This negro cooper makes all his own staves and shapes his own barrel-heads; then, with the help of a frame-vise of his own design, he puts the staves together until the rondure of their arrangement makes a barrel. Forthwith, then, he hammers on the hoops with surprising skill and dispatch. His shop is always littered with snowy strips of pine, with slabs of dry bark, with defective staves; and the air is aromatic and resinous there. It is said that a pine-woods cooper lives longer than any of his fellows; and he might well be immortal, with his wholesome, clean work to do, and such

delicious air to breathe. His profession must affect his character, for I never knew a cooper who was not merry. He is always singing and whistling, keeping time with his axe, his hammer, or his mallet. And he interprets very well the liberty, the airiness, the joyous freedom that abide in spacious forests of yellow pine.

The prevalence of these pines as a standard element of every woodland view, and as a regular background or setting for every scene, renders the aspect of the winter forest here living and green. Yet if there were no evergreens save the pines there might be a beautiful monotony to them; but there are many live-oaks and water-oaks, which are never actually bare, but which on the coming of spring reclothe themselves. The foliage of the live-oak varies only in the tints of its green; but throughout the winter the water-oak wears its red and gold autumn foliage. Then there are cedars and hollies, which in that climate and soil often attain stately heights. Sometimes long, level thickets of sweet-bay and myrtle will be tufted and plumed at intervals by these trees and by brilliant water-oaks. Along the river, where there are sere reeds to rustle and dry marsh and canebrakes to whisper, and immense

Yellow Pine Forest
near Hampton

flights of migrated wild fowl to be seen, the presence of the season is more surely felt, and the minor tones of its voice are more distinctly heard. But afar off in the forest, where myriads of robins are holding festivals of feasting in huge bunches of mistletoe and in tall holly-trees, there seems nothing wintry save the red and white berries and the happy and excited tones of the birds.

Most of these birds are haunters of evergreen trees and bushes — those which prevail sufficiently to darken the water-course and to supply dewy retreats and fragrant sanctuaries are the myrtles, the three varieties of bay, the cabbage palmettoes, the gallberries, and the wild-tea bushes. With the pines, hollies, oaks, and cedars above, and with these smaller evergreens below, the woods resemble the summer woods of the North.

And in this pine forest wild life is everywhere abundant and active; more abundant, I think, than in the summer, for in addition to the native wild things there are the migrant visitors. Birds are seen and heard everywhere; some singing and some silent, but all of them busy. Warbling sunnily, in flocks of many hundreds, there are bluebirds; think of a flock of five hundred blue-

birds flitting among the pines! There are small groups of mourning doves, which feed in the pine-lands upon grass-weeds and upon pine-mast. There are meadow-larks, which find ample shelter in the yellow broom-sedge. Along the edges of a bay-branch I flush several woodcock that go whirling off in a glimmering flight, their wings faintly whistling. The purple finches are already eating the buds of the sweet gum and the red maple, and the ruby-crowned and golden-crowned kinglets are examining food chances of two great banners of gray moss that swing from a pond cypress.

All these birds are either watchers or the watched. The watchers that I see are somewhat savage of mien: a sharp-shinned hawk darting like lightning through the forest; a Cooper's hawk perched bodefully on a low pine-stump; a marsh-harrier, flying high over the forest, beating his way to the delta where he hunts; a red-tailed hawk circling high over the trees; a great bald eagle, somewhat out of place here, but not far from his home on the wild seacoast, pursuing a lone and splendid course above the forest.

Of this great and varied family of birds none form a more interesting group than the wood-

peckers. These are naturally companionable birds, with little in their nature that is shy or subtle; and, depending as they do for a living on making a noise, they do not hesitate to announce their presence by a scraping of bark, a vehement tattoo on a dead limb, or by doughty blows on the reverberant shaft of a dry pine. The greatest of these birds, the ivory-bill, has, within the past twenty years, become extinct in South Carolina, through no known cause; but there remains the black pileated woodpecker, which is the largest and handsomest of the surviving birds of this family. For nesting purposes it makes a new hole each year; and often one tree will have four or five holes that the same woodpeckers have made. The abandoned holes are soon occupied by other birds and animals. A friend of mine found a huge dead pine which contained three pileated holes: in the first, at fifty-four feet from the ground, one of these woodpeckers was nesting; in the second, seventy feet up, there was a family of fox squirrels; and in the third, ninety feet up, a pair of sparrow hawks had built — and all were living in harmony!

Our familiar friend, the flicker, is everywhere

to be seen in these woods; and his handsomer relative, the red-cockaded woodpecker, brightens with his presence the open stretches of pine-woods.

Among the other woodpeckers that are here to be observed are the red-headed, the downy, the Southern downy, and the red-bellied. Their close cousins, the nuthatches, are here also — the white-breasted, the brown-headed, the red-breasted. Restlessness with them is a family trait shared by all the woodpecker tribe. And a cheery race they are — calling, hammering, flying hither and thither, restless, energetic, optimistic!

Turkeys and deer are the "big game" of these woods. Deer are the most interesting of all the living things of the pine-lands, but they are the most difficult to observe. At least, this is true of observation under natural conditions. Unless disturbed, they do most of their moving about at night, or in those eerie half-lights which precede dawn and darkness. But sometimes the haunting charm which is conferred on woodlands by the known presence there of essentially wild life is much the same whether the life be observed or unobserved. If it be there, the forest has a

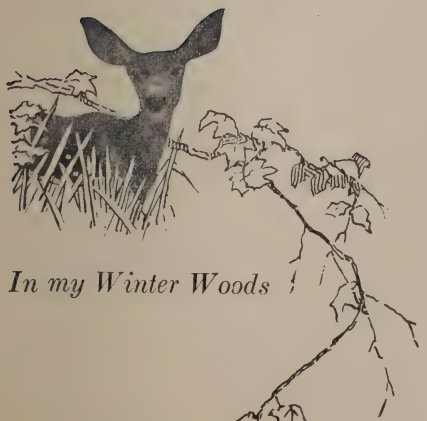
mysterious allurement that is readily sensed by the lover of nature's wilder aspects and wilder creatures. That deer are very plentiful in my winter woods is attested by the innumerable deer tracks which can be seen.

I take my place beside a pine, for I have a mind to watch for fox squirrels.

I do not have to wait long, for on balmy winter days they are as restless as woodpeckers. I see a big gray one sitting on his haunches on a fallen log, thoughtfully mastering the mysterious convolutions of a pine-cone; another one is coming slowly, watchfully, head-foremost down a tall tupelo. As I can see no black squirrels from this point of vantage, I leave my log and go quietly along a dim water-course, grown with giant short-leaf pines, maples, and sweet gums. Among the clumps of gray moss on a dwarfed gum I see what I take to be a wisp of dead moss, for it is black. But then the black object takes shape. I see the rather slender tail, the delicately shaped feet a shade darker than the coat, and the telltale white ears and nose. The moment the squirrel sees me approaching he leaps to the ground. Scurrying away the dusky fugitive chooses the largest yellow pine in the vicinity as a place of

refuge. Eighty feet it soars without a limb, and it spires forty feet above the initial branches. Up the slippery bark of this the black squirrel climbs, shrewdly keeping the immense bole of the pine between us. I time his ascent. The climb to the first limb was made in a minute and a half; and he has paused several times, not to rest, but to locate me and to set his bearings accordingly. But even the lofty refuge thus reached does not satisfy his ideas of safety. I see him ascending still, past crutches of the highest desirability, until at last he has reached the very topmost frond of the pine, the slender green spire beyond which there is naught but space and blue sky. There, a hundred and twenty feet from the ground, the fugitive clings craftily. What his feeling is it is easy to imagine: elemental fear possesses him. But the emotions of the man watching him are more complex. I admire the climber's Excelsior determination; but I regret that so beautiful a creature's attitude toward me is expressed by his swiftly putting between us the height of the loftiest object on the landscape!

Continuing my walk, I come to a woodland pond. It is several acres in extent; and even to me, to whom the sight of it is familiar, the pe-



In my Winter Woods

culiar attribute of motionlessness is strikingly noticeable. And it is in the winter that this is chiefly so. In summer in this pond, black bass can be seen jumping for dragon-flies; alligators will swim with indolent strength on the surface or will bellow grimly from its dim borders; and patriarchal frogs will encircle the edges as if holding some mysterious council. But now all these are asleep. And the waters sleep with them. The wind that is swaying the pines has small effect upon this pond; for the many trees densely bordering its edge and standing here and there in the water are draped in gray moss that affords a delicate but effective barrier. Of these trees the "bald" cypresses are at once striking in their appearance. Their tops open and spread like the sequoias, giving the appearance that they had grown to a certain level of ascent, above which no farther growth save the lateral was permissible. These cypresses usually have the outer layers of bark stripped off, which gives the trees a yellowish color. This is the work of raccoons and fox squirrels, that use this particular soft bark almost exclusively for bedding their holes. In seasons of great drought these ponds do not go dry. Nor have I ever known one to overflow.

But they are constant in loftier things than the level of their waters: for they change not in their beauty nor in their peace. A spirit broods here that is autumnal; it is rich and sad, full of haunting pathos and romantic charm. It has a tranquillity that seems entirely detached from life; and I can never look over the spiritual serenity of this place without imaging, out of the remote and mysterious vistas between the mourning cypresses, the figure of Swinburne's Proserpine:

> "Pale, beyond porch and portal,
> Crowned with calm leaves she stands,
> Who gathers all things mortal
> With cold immortal hands."

I am now within a mile of home, and the sun is not a half-hour high. For my twilight watching I choose the top of a sandy ridge that falls to a deep water-course on one side and toward level woods on the other. While I love the dawn in these woods, with the dew-hung bay-bushes, the rainy fragrances, and the happy activity of the birds, I love the twilight better; and some of the best hours of my life have been spent sitting alone on a pine-log as the evening falls. I say alone; but all about me there is life.

As the sun sinks behind the dark-tressed pines

there is movement everywhere in the forest about me and in the skies above me. One half of the life of the forest is looking for a place to sleep; another, the craftier and wilder, is coming forth. Everywhere birds are flying, with those subdued comrade calls that tell of the approach of darkness. Far above the pines there is a faint, sweet whistle of wild ducks' wings; they are hurrying, I know, to their night haunts in the waste marshes of the Santee delta. The sky is suddenly darkened by a vast flock of birds; they are Florida grackles, boat-tailed grackles, red-winged blackbirds, cowbirds, and rusty blackbirds. They are going to roost in the marshes along the river. Now, in a funereal line, pass the black vultures; their powerful flight is very impressive. A covey of quail that has been scattered by some enemy begins to call together, the sweet, querulous note of the old female having in it a human quality. Great flights of robins pass overhead, "changing swamps," or migrating from one feeding-ground to another. Befitting this hour of mystery, from the depths of a gray swamp that has been mouldering in misty silence a great horned owl gives his far and melancholy note.

The light in the west is fading. The voices of

the day give place to the voices of the night. In a lone pine standing on the edge of a pond a wild turkey has gone to roost, though I neither saw nor heard him fly to his perch. He is rather dubious over something, for he will not settle on the limb, but stands there rocking awkwardly, his long neck craned. There is a noise in the sandy road; it is the creaking buggy of an old rice planter driving homeward in the dusk. Far off I hear the melodious whooping of a negro. He does it partly from sheer love of music, and partly because "hants" fear such music as he can make. He, too, is going home. Now from the shadowy water-course below me, above whose shimmering copses a wraithlike mist is rising, two forms emerge. I thought they would come, yet I feared it might be too dark for me to see them. They are graceful beyond belief. Their movements are as fairylike as they are silent. In a little misty glade they frolic and caper. Are they the spirits of this Southern solitude? They are; for they are deer coming out of the thickets to roam the glimmering woods of night.

Their coming is the signal for my going; for now I know that there will be nothing more for me to see, save a great owl dimly brushing past

on a silent wing, or a crafty fox pausing spectrally for an instant in the road to snarl secretly at me ere he vanishes into the black woods. The old planter is now out of sight and sound. The negro has stopped his whooping, indicating that he is either at home or that the "hants" have him. The deer have vanished. The roses have faded from the great gateway of the west. The day in my winter woods is done.

CHAPTER XIV

ALLIGATORS AGAIN

THERE is a famous negro hunter in the delta country of the Santee River, in South Carolina, West McConnor by name, who has, I believe, taken more alligators than all the other hunters in that county.

"West," I said one day, "what was the closest call you ever had with an alligator?"

The negro scratched his head and looked me squarely in the eye with that inscrutable stare which the black man so readily assumes.

"Alligators, mister," said he, "ain't common. Is you sure you don't mean just 'gators?"

"No," I replied, catching the drift of his humor, "I mean 'alligators, mister' — or to turn it the other way round, mister alligators."

"The big Jackfield bull," he said at last, with a smile that showed his gleaming teeth; "he done spoil my Sunday clothes fo' me."

He then told me the following tale which I shall translate from West's quaint gullah dialect, which would be intelligible only to natives — and possibly to alligators.

One Saturday he had "set" for the great bull alligator that had long haunted an abandoned rice-land tract on the delta known as "Jack-field." On Sunday afternoon he decided to visit his set; and when he came to the head of the old canal he found the line stretched toward the water as taut as wire; but the alligator was not in sight. By tapping the rope the alligator was made to bounce to the surface; and a formidable prize he must have been, for West declared he was not under fifteen feet. West had no weapon with him; besides, he had on his Sunday clothes. But he decided to get the alligator home that evening. He thought he would make him crawl down the long rice-field bank after him.

The alligator had not swallowed the bait; instead he had been hooked through the jaw, and his frantic tuggings at the line had loosened the hook. But of all this West was not at first aware; he was forbidden by prudence to make a close inspection. At first the great bull came after the negro willingly enough; but when once fairly up on the bank, he seemed to discover what was ahead for him. Every ten or fifteen yards he would rise on his short, stocky legs, open wide his ponderous jaws, hiss harshly, and make an awk-

ward rush at his captor. As it was near twilight, as the footing on the bank was very precarious, and as West had to be doubly careful so as to preserve the sheen of his Sunday suit, the situation was full of perplexity. It was a cruel thing that the negro was doing; but retribution was coming.

It was with increasing difficulty that the hunter had been able to keep his distance from the reptile, which, having long used the bank as a crawl, was on familiar ground. Finally, just before he reached a slippery crevasse, the giant bull made a splendid rush. He probably saw before him, and to one side, the gleam of the water in the canal. West stepped quickly back, slipped, and in a moment had been plunged into the canal. Whether or not the furious bull was after him it certainly was on him; and the negro, in terror and dismay, let go the line and swam for his life. He managed to crawl out into the marsh on the other side of the canal.

I asked him if he saw the 'gator again.

"No, sah," he said; "I got hol' de line, but he 'd done gone un'er de roots of a buck-cypress growin' in de water. I pulled on it till I pulled de hook outer his jaws. But he was n't no 'gator, I tol' you."

"Is he still in Jackfield, West?"

"Yes, sah, and he's gwine stay there. He ain't no 'gator, ner not even a alligator," added the negro, a far-off look coming into his eyes; "he's a token."

By this I was given to understand that West believed the mighty bull to have powers bordering on the supernatural. And no self-respecting negro is going to tamper with a spirit.

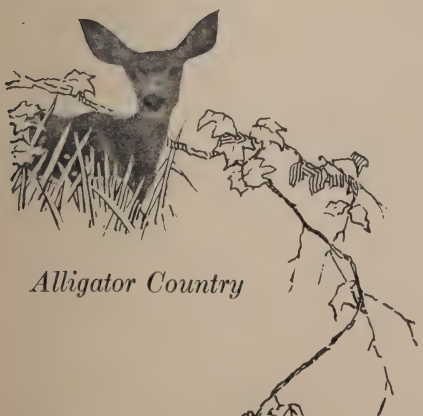
Joel Boone, a white man living in the pinelands near the Santee, told me this story of another "alligator."

"Late one afternoon I went down to Blake's Reserve" — a great artificial lake in the woods, from which, in the old days, water used to be drawn to flow the rice-fields — "to kill a 'gator. After waiting around for a while without seeing a 'gator, I got in my canoe and pushed out toward the channel. I was sitting in the stern and my coat-tails were hanging over the end. Well, since I always call a 'gator by barking like a dog, I began to tree a 'coon up one of those big cypresses. Every now and then I would stop to look and listen; but I could n't see a thing. I was just thinking of turning back for home when, out of that still water behind me, there came, with a

rush as sudden and quick as the stroke of a rattler's head, the head of a monster alligator. His jaws closed with a snap and they tore off the end of my coat. I never paddled so since I was born. I think that 'gator heard the dog barking and came creeping up under the water, not seeing the canoe, and took my black back for some kind of a canine. When I bark after this, I bark on shore."

One of the strangest mishaps that ever befell an alligator or a rice planter occurred at Eldorado Plantation. A fourteen-foot alligator attempted to enter the rice-field canal from the river by way of the trunk, which is the wooden box set in the bank for the passage back and forth of the water; when halfway through he became wedged. No one knew what was the trouble; but since the trunk would not work, a naked negro diver was sent down to discover it. He discovered it, and also his ability to break all world's records as a swimmer.

"Not me!" he protested to one of the group of negroes watching him, who had offered to hold his clothes if he would go down again. "De grandpa alligator done take up his residence in dat trunk. Not me!"



Alligator Country

Before the trunk could be put in working order the bank had to be dug away, the ponderous box lifted, and the 'gator freed from his prison by prying off one side of the structure.

I long ago ceased to wonder that the natives find so much interest in the largest of the North American saurians, having myself learned through experience that happily this great reptile is as interesting in his habits as his position would lead us to expect him to be.

The breeding habits of the alligator are naturally difficult to observe, but they have provided me not only considerable food for thought, but as well many valuable bits of "animal interest." Like the great family of terrapins and turtles, and like some snakes (especially water snakes), the alligator lays eggs. Well and good — you learned that in your school-days. These are from ten to thirty in number, and are deposited in sand or earth not far from the haunt of the old 'gator. A shallow excavation is made for the reception of the eggs, and over this when the eggs are deposited is piled a considerable mound of sand, and over this leaves and trash, and sometimes dry brush. The leaves are evidently for purposes of protective concealment, for alligator

eggs are often found and devoured by crows, foxes, buzzards, and other marauding scavengers. The eggs themselves closely resemble the eggs of the sea-turtle; they are dull white in color, and the shells are harsh to the touch; they can be dented as can all eggs of the same type. They are not so large as might be expected, averaging the size of turkey eggs, though they are round in shape.

When the time for hatching comes the little alligators emerge from the mound of sand; and while most of the eggs will have proved fertile, but a small number of the wide-awake little fellows will ever reach the water. Their movements are readily sighted by the keen-eyed birds of prey and their helplessness is recognized. Hawks, crows, buzzards, and eagles descend on the small adventurers into the world, and only the luckiest ones ever reach the water. The mother alligator seems definitely to know when her eggs will hatch; for while she seldom if ever visits the nest during incubation, she is nearly always there when the young come forth.

It is a pitiful sight to watch a tiny alligator trying to defend itself. Its instinct seems to tell it that its head and tail must be snapped together

vigorously, first on one side and then on the other. When molested a little 'gator will begin this performance, which resembles some kind of a savage dance, and will keep it up until exhausted; often during this strange reptilian tango, the eyes are closed and the movements are mechanical and clocklike.

I once observed a mother alligator attempting to shelter her young to the refuge of the water. She was as much in earnest about it as any mother could be, yet her efforts were pathetically ineffective. She was not in her element and all her movements were awkward. Her great jaws opened and snapped convulsively, her unwieldy body turned and twisted with amazing agility, but with pitiful indirection; her powerful, muscular tail struck out valiantly but impotently. I saw a big bald eagle drop grandly out of the open sky, talons wide; and in a moment he was beating his way up again, a tiny alligator struggling vainly in his claws. An osprey took one away and returned for the second; several crows were on hand for their scavenger's share. The mother alligator made painful progress toward the safe retreat offered by the dark lagoon, a hundred yards off. The bewildered little reptiles

followed as best they could, but evidently found progress through the swampy brush exceedingly discouraging. When once the thin fringe of marsh had been passed (the tiny 'gators taking famously to the wake of muddy water left by the mother) the formidable old saurian turned and the pursuers halted on the track. The sharp-taloned marauders know better than to attack the young of a 'gator when that great creature is in her element. I followed the strange procession quietly, and on approaching the lagoon I saw the monster bull alligator lying at his ease out in the deep water. Domestic cares evidently lay as lightly on him as on the proverbial lazy husband. As the little black alligators swam out toward him through the broad lily-pads, he regarded them with indolent interest; but he did not break the peace of his satisfying siesta by any movement or sound. After they once gain the water I do not think that alligators pay any more attention to their young than turtles do; they live in the shallower parts of lagoons and bayous and appear quite able to take care of themselves.

The habits of alligators during the winter, in most latitudes where the weather is liable occasionally to be severe, are also difficult to study.

They certainly hibernate; but of their choice of sleeping-places little is known. It is possible that they bury themselves in the mud under stagnant waters. But it is generally agreed that alligators have dry caverns and caves under the banks of the bodies of water which they inhabit, to which they resort, not only in winter, but also at other times, notably when they are eating their occasional but heavy feasts. It is possible that they hibernate in these subterranean haunts; which are distinct from alligator holes, that are simply favorite places of retreat beneath the water, preferably where it is deep but stagnant.

Though I have observed many hundreds of alligators, and have seen them under almost every condition imaginable, I have never yet seen one eat its catch. I have frequently observed an alligator seizing its prey or taking a bait; but the invariable subsequent move was to disappear beneath the water. Whether the saurian's victim was a pig or a dog, a wild duck or a piece of meat on a line, the 'gator's actions were always the same. Perhaps, in addition to seizing and perhaps stunning his catch with a blow of his tail, it is his habit to drown him also. At any rate, I conclude that alligators have obscure re-

sorts, above the water-line, but approachable through it only, to which they carry their victims. This belief is further strengthened by the fact, well known to alligator-hunters who bait the animals, that an alligator seems to prefer meat that is tainted to fresh meat.

In the latitude of Charleston, South Carolina, where most of these observations were made, the alligators disappear in October and reappear about the end of March or the first of April. In ponds and lagoons where they literally swarm during the spring and summer months, I have never observed one between the first of November and the first of March.

Among alligator-hunters it is a well-known fact that those taken early in the spring invariably have in their stomachs a hard substance, such as a pine-knot or a ball-like root. This is often worn and rounded as smooth as a glass ball, probably by the long processes of digestion. It is supposed that these substances are swallowed before hibernation and are disgorged in the spring; for they have been found on the shores of waters inhabited by 'gators. During the great reptiles' long sleep the presence in their stomachs of such a substance probably keeps the organs of

digestion in mild but wholesome action. I once killed a large alligator that had in its stomach an amazing object, which helped to unravel a mystery of the plantation. The object was a good-sized brass bell which the autumn before had been worn by a young heifer that had unaccountably disappeared.

Among the habits of the alligator none is more regular or characteristic than his custom of taking siestas. I once saw an amusing end of a river-bank siesta. A very large 'gator had crawled out, evidently at high water, and was sunning himself on the sedgy brink when I approached in a canoe. The tide had dropped three or four feet; and the 'gator, awaking suddenly and much excited over his danger, took a swift plunge (as he thought) into the river; falling far short he turned almost a complete somersault, striking the water with a resounding smack. He evidently thought some perilous trick had been played on him, for great was his consternation and incredibly speedy his recovery and tumultuous escape. When surprised from his siesta on a log an alligator will throw himself convulsively off with a gigantic wriggle, and the disappearing flash of his black tail will be about all that is seen

of him after he strikes the water. When a 'gator is taking his siesta on shore it is dangerous to get between him and the water, and the reason for it is simple: he is going to reach the water by the shortest route and he has the momentum of a catapult.

One day I saw a small 'gator asleep on a log, and I determined to try to catch him by wading up to him through the shallow water. It looked safe and easy; yet just before laying hands on the little fellow, I happened to sense danger behind me; looking back, I saw, directly in the course I had followed through the reeds and muddy water, a 'gator of formidable size and truculent mien; and though I had no way of establishing its relationship, it must have been the mother of the little fellow I was after. It did not take me long to get ashore; and on looking back I could see nothing of either alligator. They are very swift to vanish, and they have the advantage of all amphibious creatures in that they cannot be followed below the surface of their natural element. Yet this ability to retreat safely is an incentive toward making alligator-hunting a good sport.

Contrary to a superstition quite common even in localities in which the alligator is native, the

great reptile is easily killed with rifle or shot-gun, and is, indeed, vulnerable in many spots; in the brain and under the fore-shoulder into the heart are the most vital points. However, the 'gator possesses the stubborn vitality of many other reptiles, and often long after the huge saurian is apparently dead, he will come to life. It is at such times that the alligator is most vicious and dangerous. I once hauled an apparently lifeless ten-foot 'gator into a canoe with me; and when I had come from the lagoon into the river my monstrous companion revived, and began crawling leisurely over the side of the boat. As I anticipated no adventurous pleasure in being swamped in sixty feet of swift water, I let him crawl overboard. It was a balancing feat, as it was, to keep the canoe from capsizing. The alligator's brain is situated far back in the head and immediately between the eyes. This is naturally the most vital spot; a ball, entering the eye from either side or from any of the front angles, will almost surely pierce the brain. I have shot an alligator from behind, the bullet taking off the brain cap, but not entering the head. After one great plunge the 'gator sank, and when recovered was stone dead.

Alligators are taken at night by hide-hunters who traverse their haunts in boats fitted with lights. They rap on the gunwales, and the 'gators rise to discover the cause of the strange sound. The hunter will then shoot for the brain and seize the 'gator with a boat-hook before he sinks. This is, withal, no sport and a rather brutal proceeding. The largest 'gators are seldom taken in this way, for they seem too wary to be so easily trapped, but the younger generations are slaughtered in multitudes. The common method of taking alligators is by shooting with a rifle or by capturing with a hook and line. In the coastal waters of Florida they are sometimes harpooned.

The rifle shooting hardly need be commented upon; but there are features about hooking alligators that are not generally known. The old method was by fastening a stout wire about the middle of a thick oak stick, six or eight inches long and sharply pointed at both ends. The wire was then attached to the regular line, usually a strong cotton or hemp rope of plough-line size. The wooden hook was put lengthwise through the bait, and the alligator would generally swallow it, point down. When, however, it had passed

his narrow throat, tension on the line would turn the stake across the passage at the base of the jaws. An alligator so caught is firmly hooked and can be hauled out of the water and made to follow his captor on land. But, of course, the easiest and surest method is to use a stout hook or set of hooks, with six feet of small chain or heavy wire attached and well swiveled.

For baiting the line a squirrel or a large bird answers quite well, while a chunk of side-meat serves satisfactorily. The bait is hung over the limb of a tree or over some kind of support that is frail enough to permit the line to clear itself when the alligator strikes. Most hunters, perhaps, generally let the bait hang two feet above the water. The weight of the alligator, as he falls back into his element after having seized his prey, is almost sure to hook him securely.

On being hooked an alligator is not at all backward about trying to tear things up. When an old alligator, mad as a tortured bull in a ring, begins to cut loose, he changes the aspect of the landscape, as it were. In his mighty gyrations he may foul the rope on a snag and break it or twist it until it parts from double tension. As a rule, before the hunter gets back to the line the alligator

will have expended most of his strength and is sullen and stubborn. Until he is out of his element his tactics are invariably defensive; but once on land he will not hesitate to attack his tormentors.

Sometimes, when an alligator hole has been definitely located, it is possible to capture the reptile by simply fishing him out by means of a pole with a hook on the end of it. When, however, the alligator has been brought to the surface in this manner, he must, especially if he be of any size, be speedily dispatched, else he will smash things in all directions.

Most of the time alligators feed on fish and water birds. The sad depletion in the number of wood ducks may, I believe, be as much attributed to alligators as to hunters; for in the South wood ducks breed almost invariably over alligator-infested waters, and the half-grown ducks fall easy prey to these monstrous marauders. At other times, and as opportunity offers, alligators will kill hogs, young cattle, sheep, fawns, and particularly dogs, of which they appear excessively fond. Many a fine deer-hound has been caught while attempting to swim waters in which 'gators live. Indeed, it is an easy matter

to call a 'gator by standing on the shore of a pond or lagoon and imitating the bark of a dog.

When his prey is taken in deep water the alligator comes up under it and seizes it with his jaws. If it is in shallow water or on the shore, he approaches under water, with, perhaps, his eyes out. When near his victim he turns sideways, lunges and strikes with his tail, which sweeps the prey into the dreadful vise of the crushing jaws. In every case the 'gator after prey is a swift, silent, patient, crafty stalker. If his blow has been a fair one the animal is stunned; if not, it is so frightened and disconcerted that it is seized before it attempts to escape. The shock of the closing of the alligator's jaws is so great that there is seldom any outcry from the victim.

As the alligator grows old he is inclined to become solitary, and to take up a fixed abode, near which he can always be found. It may be beside a great tree in a lagoon, or on some point in the river, or in some elbow of a pond; there he has his domain, which he rules with morose watchfulness. The smaller alligators keep to themselves, which they have probably been taught to do by severe experience.

But in the early spring the solitaries consort

with the other 'gators. It is then that the bulls can be heard roaring — which is certainly one of the wildest, most awe-inspiring sounds in the whole realm of nature. The alligator is a silent creature; but the bellow of a great bull is amply sufficient to offset long periods of quietness on the part of the whole family. One who has heard the roar of a bull alligator will remember it as one of the unique voices of the wild, comparable to the bugling of the elk, the challenge of the lion, and the trumpeting of the elephant.

For a creature so huge and so apparently awkward the alligator is amazingly agile and swift. I have frequently tried in a canoe to overtake a swimming 'gator or to get close enough for a shot. But with an ease that was exasperating, he seemed always able to keep his distance. Often, too, a big alligator can steal quietly along, leaving hardly a noticeable ripple in his wake. At such times he swims with his partly-webbed feet, not with his tail.

The alligator is not only amphibious, but he can live in salt water as well as in fresh. Some naturalists believe that these belong to different species; but my observation has not led me to such a conclusion. In Alligator Creek, at the

mouth of the Santee River, the water as a rule is blackish. Sometimes it is wholly salt and sometimes wholly fresh. This creek is infested by alligators, and they do not seem to mind the changes in the water. They come out into the river and they follow the coast up and down. I have taken a fresh-water 'gator on the coast nine miles from the mouth of the river.

As is the case with all large game it is unsafe and unscientific to attempt to lay down any set of rules concerning their conduct. What I have said of the alligator has been from my own observation. There is no doubt that different alligators will, under identical circumstances, act differently. As the creatures of the wild increase in intelligence, the probability of their behavior is more difficult to determine; they gain in individuality and resourcefulness.

Will the alligator ever deliberately attack man? This, like the question of the shark, will have many partisans on both sides. The alligator as a menace to man is practically a negligible quantity. But if cornered and provoked an alligator will not only defend himself, but will attack his molester. I once found a big bull in the open woods crawling from a summer-dried pond to

the river. As I approached he made no attempt at flight; instead, he rose awkwardly, opened wide his great jaws, and made a waddling rush at me. His legs could not support his weight and his great bulk subsided, his jaws closing at the same time with a hissing sound. There are a few authentic instances of negroes who have been attacked and injured by alligators, but the victims themselves have generally been to blame. To swim in water where alligators are known to be would doubtless be a very foolhardy proceeding; for in the water a man seldom looks formidable, and loses, as it were, his identity. Moreover, an alligator of even ordinary size could pull under the strongest swimmer who ever swam a stroke. In short, it cannot be considered safe to tempt an alligator.

On account of the nature of its environments the alligator of North America bids sure to survive in considerable numbers. In spite of all the bags, purses, and belts which have been made from the skin, its numbers are still large in most of its natural haunts; in short, they are still so plentiful as to be common. But speaking of alligators "as are alligators," or in the words of West McConnor, "alligators, mister," meaning

the occasional big old bulls, it must be admitted that they literally "ain't common." Strange and interesting creatures, these great solitaries, living examples of those half-chimerical forms that inhabited the earth during the age of monsters.

CHAPTER XV

THAT CHRISTMAS BUCK

When I am at large in deer country there is no need for friends to try to lure me off the fascinating following of the white-tail by promises of more abundant sport with smaller game. Quail and ducks and woodcock and the like do not look very good when a man feels that an old buck with majestic antlers is waiting in the woods for some one to talk business to him. I admit that the game of deer-hunting is sometimes tedious and the shooting of the occasional variety; yet my experience has been that the great chance does come to the faithful, and that to make good on it is to drink one of Life's rarest juleps, the memory of whose flavor is a delight for years.

It may be that this love of deer-hunting was not only born in me — the men of my family always having been sportsmen — but was made ingrowing by a curious happening that occurred when I was not a year old. One day I was left alone in a large room in the plantation house where first I saw the light of day. Lying thus

in my crib, what should come roaming in but a pet buck that we had. My mother, in the greatest dismay, found him bending over me, while, if we may believe the account, I had hold of the old boy's horns and was crowing with delight. I have always felt sure that the old stag (since he knew that his own hide was safe) passed me the mystic word concerning the rarest sport on earth. He put it across to me, all right; and I am going to do my best here to hand on the glad tidings. I want to tell about a deer-hunt we had one Christmas not long past.

Things on the plantation had been going badly with me. There were plenty of deer about, and a most unusual number of very large bucks; but our hunting-party had achieved nothing of a nature worth recording. We had been at the business nearly a week, and we were still eating pork instead of venison. That's humiliating; indeed, in a sense, degrading. On a certain Wednesday (we had begun to hunt on the Thursday previous) I took our negro driver aside. It was just after we had made three unsuccessful drives, and just after some of the hunters had given me a look that, interpreted, seemed to mean that I could easily be sold to a sideshow as the only

real fakir in captivity. In the lee of a great pine I addressed my partner in crime.

"Prince," I said, drawing a flask from my pocket, "as deer-hunters you and I are n't worth a Continental damn." (This term, as my readers know, is a good one, sound and true, having been the name of a coin minted before the Revolution.)

"Dat's so, sah, suttinly so," Prince admitted, his eyes glued to the flask, his tongue moistening his lips.

"Now," I went on, "we are going to drive this Little Horseshoe. Tell me where to stand so that we can quit this fooling."

The flask sobered Prince marvelously, as I knew it would. To a negro there is no tragedy like seeing a drink without getting it; and the possibility of such a disaster made the good-natured Prince grave.

"Dis summer," he said, "I done see where an able buck done used to navigate regular by the little gum-tree pond. Dat must be he social walk," he further explained; "and dat may be he regular run. You stop there, Cap'n, and if he is home, you will bline he eye."

That sounded good to me. Therefore, the

calamity that Prince dreaded might happen did not occur; for we parted in high spirits, and with high spirits in at least one of us. But there must have been a prohibition jinx prowling about, for what happened shortly thereafter appeared like the work of an evil fate.

As I was posting the three standers, the man who had already missed four deer took a fancy to the stand by the gum-tree pond. I tried politely to suggest that there was a far better place, for him, but he remained obdurate. I therefore let him stay at what Prince had described as the critical place. And it was not five minutes later that Prince's far-resounding shout told me that a stag was afoot. Feeling sure that the buck would run for the pond, I stood up on a log, and from that elevation I watched him do it. He was a bright, cherry-red buck, and his horns would have made an armchair for ex-President Taft. He ran as if he had it in his crafty mind to run over the stander by the pond and trample him. He, poor fellow, missed the buck with both barrels. His roaring ten-gauge gun made enough noise to have stunned the buck; but the red-coated monarch serenely continued his march. All this happened near sundown, and it was the

end of a perfectly doleful day. Prince laid the blame for the bull on me when he said, in mild rebuke:

"How, Cap'n, make you did n't put a true gunnerman to the critical place?"

The next day — the seventh straight that we had been hunting — it was an uncle of mine who got the shot. And this thing happened not a quarter of a mile from where the other business had come off. My uncle and I were hardly a hundred yards apart in the open, level, sunshiny pine-woods. Before us was a wide thicket of bays about five feet high. The whole stretch covered about ten acres. Prince was riding through it, whistling on the hounds. Suddenly I heard a great bound in the bays. Prince's voice rang out — but a second shout was stifled by him designedly. A splendid buck had been roused. He made just about three bounds and then stopped. He knew very well that he was cornered, and he was evidently wondering how to cut the corners. The deer was broadside to my uncle and only about fifty yards off. I saw him carefully level his gun. At the shot the buck, tall antlers and all, collapsed under the bay-bushes.

Then the lucky hunter, though he is a good

woodsman, did a wrong thing. Leaning his gun against a pine, he began to run forward toward his quarry dragging out his hunting-knife as he ran. When he was within ten yards of the buck the thing happened. The stunned stag (tall horns and all) leaped clear of danger, and away he went rocking through the pine-lands. Believing that the wound might be a fatal one we followed the buck a long way. Finally, meeting a negro woodsman who declared that the buck had passed him "running like the wind," we abandoned the chase. A buckshot had probably struck the animal on the spine, at the base of the skull, or on a horn. Perhaps the buck simply dodged under cover at the shot; I have known a deer so to sink into tall broom-sedge.

That night our hunting-party broke up. Only Prince and I were left on the plantation. Before we parted that evening I said:

"You and I are going out to-morrow. And we'll take one hound. We'll walk it."

The next day, to our astonishment, we found a light snow on the ground — a rare phenomenon in the Carolina woods. We knew that it would hardly last for the day; but it might help us for a while.

In the first thicket that we walked through a buck fawn came my way. He was a handsome little fellow, dark in color and chunky in build. It is possible to distinguish the sex of a fawn even when the lithe creature is on the fly, for the doe invariably has a longer and sharper head and gives evidences of a slenderer, more delicate build. I told the bucklet that I would revisit him when he had something manly on his head.

Prince and I next circled Fawn Pond, a peculiar pond fringed by bays. Our hound seemed to think that somebody was at home here. And we did see tracks in the snow that entered the thicket; however, on the farther side we discerned them departing. But they looked so big and so fresh that we decided to follow them. Though the snow was melting fast I thought the tracks looked as if two bucks had made them. Deer in our part of Carolina are so unused to snow that its presence makes them very uncomfortable, and they do much wandering about in daylight when it is on the ground.

Distant from Fawn Pond a quarter of a mile through the open woods was Black Tongue Branch, a splendid thicket, so named because once there had been found on its borders a great

buck that had died of that plague of the deer family — the black tongue, or anthrax. Deciding to stay on the windward side (for a roused deer loves to run up the wind) I sent Prince down to the borders of the branch, telling him to cross it, when together the two of us would flank it out. The tracks of the deer seemed to lead toward Black Tongue, but we lost them before we came to the place itself. While I waited for Prince and the leashed hound to cross the end of the narrow thicket, I sat on a pine-log and wondered whether our luck that day was to change. Suddenly, from the green edges of the bay I was aware of Prince beckoning violently for me to come to him. I sprang up. But we were too slow. From a deep head of bays and myrtles, not twenty steps from where the negro was standing, out there rocked into the open woods as splendid a buck as it has ever been my fortune to see. He had no sooner cleared the bushes than he was followed by his companion, a creature fit to be his mate. They were two old comrades of many a danger. Their haunches looked as broad as the tops of hogsheads. Their flags were spectacular. They were just about two hundred yards from me, and, of course, out of gunshot.

Had I been with Prince at that moment (as I had been up to that fatal time) I should have had a grand chance — a chance such as does not come even to a hardened hunter more than a few times in a hundred years or so. The bucks held a steady course straight away from me; and their pace was a rocking, rhythmic, leisurely one. Speechless I watched them go for half a mile; my heart was pretty nearly broken. As for Prince — when I came up to him, I found him quite miserable and unnerved.

"Oh, Cap'n, if you had only been where I been jest now!" was all he could say.

From the direction that the two great animals had taken the negro and I thought that we knew just where they were going. Telling him to hold the hound for about fifteen minutes I took a long circle in the woods, passing several fine thickets where the old boys might well have paused, and came at last to a famous stand on a lonely road. Soon I heard the lone hound open on the track, and you can imagine with what eagerness I awaited the coming of what was before him. The dog came straight for me; but when he broke through the last screen of bays he was alone. The deer had gone on. It was not

hard to find where they had crossed the road some ten yards from where I had been standing. Judging from the easy way in which they were running they were not in the least worried. And from that crossing onward they had a perfect right not to be concerned; for beyond the old road lay a wild region of swamp and morass into which the hunter can with no wisdom or profit go.

I did not stop the dog, deciding that by mere chance the bucks might, if run right, dodge back and forth, and so give me the opportunity for which I was looking. The old hound did his best; and the wary antlered creatures, never pushed hard, did some cunning dodging before him. Once again I saw them far away through the woodlands, but a glimpse of their distant beauty was all the comfort afforded me. After a two-hour chase the hound gave them up. Prince and I had to confess that we had been outwitted, and in a crestfallen mood we quitted the hunt for the day.

The next day was my last one at home; and every hunter is surely familiar with the feeling of the man who, up until the last day, has not brought his coveted game to bag. I felt that we should have luck on our side or else be beaten.

I told Prince as much, and he promised to be on hand at daybreak.

Before dawn I was awakened by the sound of a steady winter rain softly roaring on the shingle roof of the old plantation house. It was discouraging, to be sure; but I did not forget that the rain ushered in my last day. By the time I was dressed Prince had come up. He was wet and cold. He reported that the wind was blowing from the northeast. Conditions were anything but promising. However, we had hot coffee, corncakes deftly turned by Prince, and a cheering smoke. After such reinforcement weather can be hanged. By the time that the dim day had broadened we ventured forth into the stormy pine-lands, where the towering trees were rocking continuously, and where the rain seemed able to search us out, however we tried to keep to the leeward of every sheltering object. The two dogs that we had compelled to come with us were wet and discouraged. Their heads, I knew, were full of happy visions of the warm plantation fireside that they had been forced to leave. Besides, it was by no means their last day, and their spirit was utterly lacking in all the elements of enthusiasm.

After about four barren drives, when Prince and I were soaked quite through and were beginning to shiver despite precautions that we took (in Southern deer-hunting a "precaution" means only one thing), I said:

"Now, Hunterman, this next drive is our last. We'll try the Little Corner, and hope for the best."

Two miles through the rainy woods I plodded to take up my stand. All the while I took to do this Prince waited, his back against a pine, and with the sharp, cold rain searching him out. The wind made the great pines rock and sigh. Even if the dogs should break into full chorus I thought I could never hear them coming. At last I reached my stand. A lonely place it was, four miles from home, and in a region of virgin forest. So much of the wide woodland through which I had come looked so identical that it hardly seemed reasonable to believe that a deer, jumped two miles back in a thicket, would run to this particular place. But men who know deer nature know what a deer will do. I backed up against an old sweet-gum tree, waiting in that solitary, almost savage place. I thought that in about a half-hour my good driver, bedraggled and weary,

would come into sight, and that then we two disillusioned ones would go home sloshing through the drizzle.

But wonderful things happen to men in the big woods. Their apparently insane faith is not infrequently rewarded. Hardly had I settled myself against the big tree for shelter when, far off, in a momentary lulling of the grieving wind, I heard the voice of a hound. One of the dogs had a deep bass note, and it was this that I heard. Sweet music it was to my ears, you may well believe! From where I was standing I could see a good half-mile toward the thickets whence had come the hound's mellow, rain-softened note. And now, as I looked searchingly in that direction, I saw the deer, heading my way, and coming at a wild and breakneck pace. At that distance I took the fugitive for a doe. It was running desperately, with head low, and lithe, powerful legs eating up the pine-land spaces. If it held its course it would pass fifty yards to the left of me. I turned and ran crouchingly until I thought I had reached a place directly in the oncoming deer's pathway. I was in a slight hollow; and the easy rise of ground in front of me hid for a few moments the approaching racer. I fully ex-

pected a big doe to bound over the rise and to run slightly on my left. I had a slight suspicion that the deer might be an old buck, with small, poor horns that on my first and distant view had not been visible. But it was not so.

Hardly had I reached my new stand when over the gentle swell of ground, grown in low broom-grass, there came a mighty rack of horns forty yards away to my right. Then the whole buck came full into view. There were a good many fallen logs just there, and these he was maneuvering with a certainty and a grace and a strength that it was a sight to behold. But I was there for more than just "for to admire."

As he was clearing a high obstruction I gave him the right barrel. I distinctly saw two buckshot strike him high up — too high. He never winced or broke his stride. Throwing the gun for his shoulder, I fired. This brought him down — but by no means headlong, though, as I afterwards ascertained that twelve buckshot from the choke barrel had gone home. The buck seemed crouching on the ground, his grand crowned head held high, and never in wild nature have I seen a more anciently crafty expression than that on his face. I think he had not seen me before I

shot; and even now he turned his head warily from side to side, his mighty horns rocking with the motion. He was looking for his enemy. I have had a good many experiences with the behavior of wounded bucks; therefore I reloaded my gun and with some circumspection approached the fallen monarch. But my caution was needless. The old chieftain's last race was over. By the time I reached him that proud head was lowered and the fight was done.

Mingled were my feelings as I stood looking down on that perfect specimen of the deer family. He was in his full prime. Though somewhat lean and rangy because this was toward the close of the mating season, his condition was splendid. The hair on his neck and about the back of his haunches was thick and long and dark. His hoofs were very large, but as yet unbroken. His antlers were, considering all points of excellence, very fine. They bore ten points.

My short reverie was interrupted by the clamorous arrival of the two hounds. These I caught and tied up. Looking back toward the drive I saw Prince coming, running full speed. The dogs had not had much on him in the race. When he came up and saw what had happened, wide was

the happy smile that broke like dawn on his dusky face.

"Did you see him in the drive, Prince?" I asked. "He surely is a beauty."

"See him?" the negro ejaculated in joyous excitement. "Cap'n, dat ole thing been lyin' so close that when he done jump up he throw sand in my eye! I done reach for he big tail to ketch him! But I done know," he ended, "dat somebody else been waitin' to ketch him."

I sent Prince home for a horse on which we could get the buck out of the woods. While he was gone I had a good chance to look over the prone monarch. He satisfied me. And the chief element in that satisfaction was the feeling that, after weary days, mayhap, and after adverse experiences, the great chance will come. For my part that Christmas hunt taught me that it is worth while to spend some empty days for a day brimmed with sport. And one of the lasting memories of my life is the recollection of that cold, rainy day in the Southern pine-lands — my last day for that hunting trip — and my best.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SOUTHERN FOX SQUIRREL

THE sunny wide pine-lands are still save for the restless calling of the nuthatches and the far-off whooping of the negro who has been sent around a big thicket to drive out the deer. For woods so wild and virgin, it seems for a time that they are singularly lacking in wild life. But that is because the wild life has seen the approach of the deer-stander. But if he will sit quietly beside the big pine that he has chosen as a stand, he may see much — though what has already seen him may continue to lie close for a long time yet. But other wild life, moving out in front of the whooping negro and the trailing dogs, will come out to him unaware. Of these forms few are more beautiful and graceful than the fox squirrel.

Many a time, as a deer-stander such as the one just described, I have watched this beautiful dweller in the great pine-forests of the Carolina coastal plain. My observation has taught me that, except at two seasons of the year, the fox squirrel is a worker on the ground. He is far

more so than the common gray squirrel, and infinitely more so than that common pest, the red squirrel. The reason for this is simple: the chief food of the fox squirrel is pine-mast and young buds. In the late summer he has a great habit of feeding on the ripening mast; sometimes he will cut off the pine-cones, drop them, and then come after them. Again he will pull them toward him as he sits with precarious grace on a high pine-limb and will open the tight sheaths that hide the coveted food. As the cones begin of themselves to fall, and as the wind begins to drift the mast down, the squirrels come down to feed. They travel great distances on the ground, foraging as far as a quarter of a mile from the den tree. When pursued on the ground, if they do not take at once to a pine they appear to prefer to run on fallen logs than on the ground itself. And they can make good time on a log if the bark is n't too slippery. However, both on the ground and in trees I think fox squirrels are not so quick and resourceful as the gray. In high trees they move with a good deal of care, and they do little long jumping.

In the spring of the year — that is, during the month of March in most parts of the South — it

is a comparatively easy matter to find all the fox squirrels in any one section of country by visiting, in the early morning or late afternoon, all the redbud maple-trees. This squirrel is excessively fond of the buds of this tree which come early; and it will do more venturing after this food than it will after mast. I remember seeing a black fox squirrel out on the tip of a redbud limb, bending it down some ten feet. It was a curious sight in wild life to observe this coal-black squirrel, with its characteristic white ears and nosetip, delicately maneuvering among the pink buds. One day, following a water-course in the pine-lands, I counted eleven of these fine animals in a walk of a mile, and every one was in a redbud tree.

I mentioned a black squirrel. This color-phase is not very rare; and other variations from the standard iron-gray are common. Occasionally a pure white fox squirrel is found. Other colors range from light gray to the deepest black; sometimes a piebald specimen is seen — that is, one having a gray body and black legs and feet or a body splotched with black and gray. The one constant feature of the coloring is the white on the ears and the nose. In the North this coloring

is not characteristic of the fox squirrel; and in the matter of body-coloring there is usually a good deal of dull rusty red. The Southern fox squirrel is undoubtedly larger than that of the North; but the Northern gray squirrel is superior to its cousin of the warmer latitudes.

The Southern fox squirrel loves to nest in a dead pine — often in the abandoned sleeping-hole of a black pileated woodpecker. At other times he will be found in hollow tupelos, sweet gums, and pond cypresses. In whatever situation he may decide to make his home one feature of it is almost as characteristic as is the snake-skin in the nest of the great-crested flycatcher: this is that the nest is lined with soft strippings from the pond cypress. In the Southern woods, wherever fox squirrels are found, it will be observed that the cypresses have had their outer bark stripped. I have seen a fox squirrel in the open woods carrying a mouthful of the silky yellow fiber; and he had traveled some distance to get it.

On being startled and pursued a fox squirrel will nearly always choose a big pine for climbing. A feature of his ascent is worth noticing. If at all badly scared he usually does this: with hardly a

pause he will climb until he has reached the topmost spiring frond of the great pine, and there he will cling as long as he believes that danger is present. I have watched a fox squirrel thus cling motionless in his precarious position for upward of three quarters of an hour. It is exceedingly difficult to see a squirrel unless the pine-top be somewhat open. I may add that the same game is sometimes played by a wild turkey. More than once I have vainly tried to see a turkey that had alighted on the very crest of a big short-leaf pine.

Except under certain conditions the fox squirrel is a silent creature. He permits the gray to do the barking. But once I drove two old black ones into a hole in a den tree. I don't know how many more were there, but I have never heard such a racket as they set up. This continued for at least five minutes. Matters must, however, have been amicably settled, for the two blacks did not reappear.

The fox squirrel is one of the familiar sights of the lonelier roads that wind through the forests of the South. He is, however, a lover of big timber, as are the other squirrels; and after the waste left by the lumberman he is likely to move off

into uncut timber. When given anything like protection, and when his native woods remain intact, the fox squirrel increases rapidly. During the late winter, while on a deer-stand at the Santee Club, whose great estate near the mouth of the Santee is a sanctuary for many kinds of game, I saw numbers of these fine squirrels playing about almost as tamely as grays frolic in some city parks. It is a pity that the negro and his trailing cur dog have accounted for the depleting of the ranks of the fox squirrel in the free-range woods; but even there he maintains something like encouraging numbers. To me, no sight of wild life is more pleasing on a sunny winter's day in the lonely pine-lands than the graceful, alert, delicate movements of this most beautiful of all the squirrels.

CHAPTER XVII

THE OTTER: PLAYBOY OF NATURE

One winter day while on a duck hunt I was being paddled by a negro boatman through one of the many winding creeks that interlace the broad delta of the Santee, a few miles above its mouth. Expecting to jump ducks at almost every turn, we were moving slowly and silently. This manner of progress enabled us to see many forms of wild life; some of these birds and animals we saw before they saw us, and we were therefore observing them quietly going about some of their routine practices. I remember seeing an old marsh 'coon, plodding along the muddy border of the creek. In that region, where fur-bearers are little molested, raccoons are often seen abroad during the day. We saw two minks gracefully and swiftly swimming across the creek. Shy king rails stood preening themselves on small tidal flats; these hurriedly made use of their long, muscular legs as soon as they saw our canoe approaching. Not infrequently, because the creek was so still and the sunny stretches of it were so drowsy and warm, we came upon sleeping ducks. Some

of these were on the motionless water; others were on sand-spits. All had their heads neatly tucked beneath their wings; but invariably they appeared to have one eye open, or at least exposed, so that it flew open at the first sign or sound of danger approaching.

As we rounded a particularly peaceful bend, making up to where an old rice-mill with its wharf once had stood, my paddler told me to be ready, as we were sure to jump something. His caution was a timely one; although what we saw did not "jump." Indeed, both of us were too surprised to do anything but look with fascinated eyes on what is perhaps as rare a scene to human gaze as there is in all the great panorama of wild life: a number of otters were disporting themselves on the quiet waters of the creek just ahead of us. We were very close to the left bank of the stream, and my paddler, by a deft maneuver, sunk his paddle in the soft mud, staying the progress of the boat. For some fortunate reason the beautiful and graceful creatures before us did not for the moment see us. We were therefore privileged to watch the family in its purely wild state, and certainly in a most playful mood.

Every form of wild life has some trait in its

nature that under normal conditions predominates, and the otter's is a singularly attractive one: it is playfulness. Most wild creatures when young have spells of being frolicsome; but in the majority of instances this playfulness disappears with youth. In the otter, however, it lasts as long as life; and nothing is so characteristic of it as the playing of some sort of joyous game.

In the few minutes allowed us for watching, before the shy creatures saw us, we saw a bewildering number of things happen. In the first place, the otters, as my negro boatman expressed it, "had the creek all tore up." They did in the sense that they were disporting themselves in the water at so lively a rate that the stretch of creek was full of ripples and choppy waves, and with sleek brown bodies swimming, turning somersaults, and performing all sorts of aquatic antics with the utmost ease and abandon.

There was a rather steep, muddy bank on the left; and twice down this we saw an otter slide in fun, striking the water hard and sending it flying. The mud-covered timbers of an old wharf were just beyond the slide, and were, at this particular time of tide, almost flush with the water. On these old logs the otters would climb, glistening

in the warm sun, and move with their swift, paddling gait to a convenient launching-place, and then plunge into the creek — only, after a few gay somersaults, to return to the logs. Sometimes a majority of the family would be under water; again, most of them would be on the logs. There were certainly four, perhaps five, of them. It was more difficult to count accurately than can easily be imagined. As soon as we had "taken the number" of one he would vanish, and another would appear. But of seeing four at one time we were certain. And of all my memories of wild-life pictures I think I would exchange this for no other.

Suddenly, and almost simultaneously, an electric shock appeared to pass through the whole family. Alas, they had seen us! Instantly four slim, dark bodies vanished with incredible swiftness under the yellow waters. In each case the last thing we saw of each of the shy creatures was the long, somewhat flattened, heavily furred tail. When an otter means to dive deep, it humps its back and goes straight down, its long tail waving curiously.

After the family had vanished we sat still in the canoe for a long time. But not another

glimpse were we afforded of the otters. Meanwhile the waters of the creek became calm, and we might have imagined that we had been dreaming if the signs of the fur-bearers having been present had not been so abundant. Upon examining their "playground" we found that the muddy slope had been used as a regular slide, apparently for a long time. On the logs, which had a half-inch deposit of mud, were fresh tracks and old tracks; and at the end of one was a remnant of a fish that an otter had left. The exact place where I made this observation was in Atkinson's Creek, between Moorland and Tranquillity plantations, some three miles from the mouth of the North Santee River.

And what became of that interesting family? I never saw any one of them again. Undoubtedly we had happened upon a regular haunt of these fine animals; but I had learned what perhaps few people know: and that is that the otter is a wanderer. He will, it is true, inhabit a certain region; but he is a restless traveler, and will cover prodigious distances, usually, of course, by the water route, but not infrequently wholly by land, as when he desires to go cross-country from one river to another. As nearly as I have been able

to ascertain — for the habits of a creature so excessively shy can never perhaps be established with finality — the otter has ranges; and favorite places along his routes have periodic visitations from him. This is true wherever the otter is found; for example, an otter will range for many miles up and down a river.

This habit accounts for the apparently strange appearance near big cities of this exceedingly wild and rare creature. For an instance of such an appearance, I may mention that early in the winter of 1920 two very fine specimens of the otter were taken within a few miles of Philadelphia, in a region whence the otter was long since supposed to have vanished. Undoubtedly these animals had come downstream from some wild region. However, so shrewd is the otter that it is not impossible for him to live near man, and even near large centers of population. The largest otter-skin I ever measured was from an old male otter taken in a creek very close to Charleston. This hide was very beautiful, being almost black in color. It was forty-two inches long, with a tail seventeen inches long.

To show further that the otter will not remain long in one place, I may say that I observed in

Wambaw Reserve, a large freshwater lake near my home in Carolina, a splendid specimen of the animal. As there was not any hunting or trapping in that section just then, I am satisfied that the creature was undisturbed; but, for all my watching, I never saw it there again, despite the fact that the lonely lagoon was an ideal place for it. However, not long after I saw an otter some four miles away, in an old rice-field that had obscure water connections with the Reserve. I surmise that this was my otter, but it was impossible for me to confirm the guess.

In the old days of rice-planting the otter was a creature considered valuable to the owners of the fields, for he is a wonderful destroyer of crawfish; and these latter creatures often wrought great damage by burrowing through the banks, thus causing serious leaks and disastrous floods. The otter's staple diet consists of fish; and I need say nothing more of his skill in catching fish than that it is an easy pastime for him to capture the wariest and wildest brook trout. Indeed, if once an otter gets in a trout-stream or in a trout-preserve, he may do great damage. As he is a large and powerful animal he has a ravenous appetite; and it is a fairly true saying that

Lagoon near the House

when he is not playing he is eating. There is absolutely nothing sluggish or lazy about the otter. All his movements are quick and alert; and even on land, though awkward, he can cover ground rapidly. As a swimmer I should put him in a class by himself. His tail helps him in this, but his expertness in the water is due chiefly to his curious feet, which are webbed much like a duck's. The feet are also furnished with sharp claws, whose principal use is to enable the animal to seize its prey.

Mention has been made of the otter's strength. Perhaps no other animal of its size is a better fighter. Though naturally gentle and playful, he is no mean antagonist. He is said to be greatly feared by minks, which are creatures of somewhat similar habits.

The otter builds no house. Its home — if it may be said to have a regular home — is usually in a bank-burrow, with an entrance close to the water-line; and this burrow commonly extends under the roots of some old tree overhanging the water. Inasmuch as I know that an otter cannot be depended upon to be at home regularly, I am sure that he has several of these haunts, in any one of which he may upon occa-

sion be found. Sometimes they are seen in very strange places. An uncle of mine once observed two playing in a small pool of fresh water beside a pine-land road, many miles from a river. They were probably migrating from one large body of water to another, and merely stopped in the woodland pool to have a little frolic.

I never fully appreciated the otter's sense of humor until I used to watch one in captivity in Hampton Park, in Charleston. Despite the fact that it was in rather cramped quarters, it was by far the most lively of all the animals being exhibited. There was something pathetic in the way in which this harmless and gentle animal tried to entertain itself. I even saw it try to slide down a rough concrete slope into a little tank of water. Always it was bright, active, amusing, friendly. An otter never sulks. I think if it were properly trained, it would be an amazingly intelligent performer — far more so than a seal. It is one of the few animals that are, in captivity, entertaining by nature. Most of these prisoners are morose and unhappy, but the otter seems always happy, childish, and spontaneously gay.

Of the famous sea-otter of the North Pacific I have no personal knowledge; for I have never

seen one of these creatures alive. I do know, however, that formerly it ranged from California to the Aleutian Islands; and that now it is found only in certain parts of Alaskan waters, where by law its hunting is strictly limited to the natives. A white man taking a sea-otter pays a fine of five hundred dollars. This otter has seal-like habits, and is really a child of the wild ocean. Though oftenest found near shore it has been taken more than forty miles at sea. It sleeps on its back in the water, literally "rocked in the cradle of the deep." The female sea-otter gives birth to only one young at a time, and this baby is born on a bed of floating kelp, perhaps many miles from land. The mother takes her child into the sea with her, and is said to handle and play with it as a human mother plays with her baby.

The fur of the sea-otter is more highly prized than any other kind of fur; and even the common otter has an unfortunate bounty on his coat. A fine sea-otter hide has brought more than one thousand dollars at a fur sale. For my part I wish that there were not an otter in captivity; and I heartily wish that the killing of these beautiful, gentle, and harmless creatures would cease. I know of no animal so appealing; and if

we do not know enough about it to pity it, this is because we have hunted it almost to the point of extermination.

A strange characteristic of the otter (which is shared by many fish, the mink, the alligator, and other creatures) is its ability to live equally well in fresh or salt water. Where its home is near the sea it is constantly passing from fresh water into salt or living in brackish waters. I know now of an otter that lives in a long brackish creek, one end of which meets a fresh-water river, and the other end of which flows into a salt bay. Undoubtedly this otter makes use of both exits. Recently, while in a boat within sight of the ocean surf, I saw two otters swimming far up the creek ahead. They were then in wholly salt water; but I knew that if they continued their course, they would soon reach brackish, and then fresh, water. The fact that the otter thrives in any waters broadens the limits of its range. And in times of flood, when all natural landmarks are obliterated, this extent of range will be incredibly widened. I have in time of a great flood seen an otter where surely one never had appeared before; he had come I knew not whence, and went I knew not whither.

This observation occurred one rainy day when I was abroad in a boat on a terrible freshet tide that had inundated the Santee delta. In going through a small tract of woods near the house — woods in which the water stood twelve feet deep — I saw a beautiful otter swimming near me. For a moment, probably because the rain interfered with his sight, he did not make me out, and I was enabled to identify and admire him. Then he humped in his characteristic way, waved his long tail, and was gone. Though I waited about the place for a half-hour, he never reappeared. But I am always glad to remember that an otter actually came so near our house, albeit under extraordinary circumstances.

Such are some of the ways of this appealing wild creature: an animal whose intelligence, gentleness, and genuine love for play should endear him to every lover of nature. Not long ago a negro trapper told me that he had watched two otters in an old ditch that had more mud in it than water. I asked him what they were doing.

"Just playin' 'bout," he said. And that gives an admirable picture of the most common habit of the otter — "just playin' 'bout."

CHAPTER XVIII

WILD DUCKS AND RICE-FIELDS

One of the very useful and informative maps of the Biological Survey shows graphically the distribution points of the migrated ducks and geese during the winter months. The observer of this map will see that the makers thereof have apparently taken a pepper-shaker and dusted the lower Pacific Coast; they have done the same to the lower Mississippi Valley; along the Gulf coasts of Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, they upset the pepper. But they had enough left thereof to sprinkle somewhat liberally the Gulf coast of Alabama, and the seaboard of Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia. Especially were the map-makers generous in showing that the great delta of the Santee River is a regular Riviera for the wintering wild fowl. I am glad that due justice has thus officially been done this region; for it is one of the most picturesque and interesting in America; and it is one of the great concentration camps of the migrants. There are not, indeed, many geese there; occasionally in very cold

weather a flock will be seen. I have counted fifty-six in one such flight. But they winter to northward on Currituck, and far to the southwestward. However, on some of the rivers of upper Carolina wild geese are not uncommon. But the district in question is one into which, from the close of October to the close of March, countless thousands of wild ducks throng. The reason for the ducks' love of this country is both natural and interesting.

Formerly this was the best-known rice-growing section of America. Thousands of acres of land of fabulous richness, both on the delta itself between the North and South Santee and on the low-lying country adjacent, were under a high state of cultivation before the Civil War. It was a busy, prosperous, and beautiful country in those days. The war naturally put a damper on extensive agricultural operations; but it by no means terminated rice-planting. As late as 1900 great crops of rice were grown along the Santee; but now there is hardly an acre planted. One hunting club, indeed, plants rice for the ducks; and it has at present a project under consideration for reclaiming a thousand acres of delta land. But the old planting days are over.

The reason is not commonly understood. It is simply this: within the last twenty years the Santee has been subject to freshets of such height and of proportions so formidable that no man-made dikes could keep out the waters. Formerly a ten-foot rise was thought large; in 1916 there was a twenty-six-foot rise in the region lying about ten miles above the river-mouth. Such waters make rice-growing impossible.

The phenomenal floods in the Santee are directly traceable to the deforesting of the mountains and hills in the northwestern part of the State, where the river rises; indeed, almost the whole region through which it now flows, formerly heavily wooded, is bared of timber. The rains, therefore, with no growth to check them until the soil can absorb them, run straight into the river; and the end of rice-planting is the result. As I have, through many years, watched this inevitable thing happen, I have been curiously interested to see whether the passing of rice as duck food would mean the passing also of the ducks. As they probably were attracted originally to certain localities by the character of the food obtainable there, it was reasonable to suppose that they might seek other haunts when

the food-supply was withdrawn. But this has not proved true in this instance. Of course rice was a kind of dessert; there are other foods abundant in the delta of the Santee, and to the mighty swamps north of the delta the ducks annually repair at a certain time to feed on the acorns there.

As far as my observation extends, the ducks in the region mentioned show a decided increase in numbers over the ducks wintering there ten years ago; the number appears to be about equal to that of thirty years ago. This is saying much. This increase is undoubtedly due to the excellent spring-shooting law which prevents the slaughter of thousands of paired ducks on their way to the breeding-grounds. I say "paired," because often, even before leaving their winter home, these wild fowl show signs of mating. In mid-March, among the greening cypresses fringing a swamp along the Santee, I have repeatedly jumped paired mallards and widgeons, black ducks, teal and ruddy ducks. But better evidence of their housekeeping plans than is afforded by their merely being paired is the fact that, if one's approach is quiet and crafty, he can hear some fond speech that means but one thing, and is therefore

wholly different from the loud and jovial quacking of the materialistic winter season.

It is a strange thing that some of these ducks do not breed in the Santee delta; for the opportunities there are admirable. I have, indeed, found both the eggs and the young of mallard ducks in the marshes of this great wild tract; but the ducks thus breeding were undoubtedly wounded ones, which did not recover in time to join the regular spring flight northward. Audubon, however, found an American merganser breeding on a small lagoon here; and, of course, the wood duck breeds regularly. It is generally known, I presume, that this interesting duck lays its eggs in the hollow of a tree over water, or in the fork of a tree growing in the water; but occasionally a wood duck will build far from water, and at a height from the ground that is surprising. Such a nest was found not far from the Santee delta by Arthur Wayne, the well-known ornithologist. The duck had nested in a hollow abandoned by a black pileated woodpecker. This home was forty feet from the ground, and more than a mile from the nearest water.

That the delta of the Santee should continue to attract wild fowl is due not only to the delight-

ful climate there, and to the quantities of food available at all times, but also to certain features of the landscape which form almost the only trace of the old rice-planting régime. I mean that the interminable marsh-grown areas are intersected at regular intervals by old canals and ditches, which are not only kept open, but in some cases are actually deepened by the constant dredging of the tides. Many of the great canals, constructed almost two hundred years ago, are now wide and placid sheets of water, overhung by bushes and reeds, and so well protected by high banks that even on a stormy day hardly a wave disturbs their surfaces. Then, too, there are winding creeks of astonishing length and contortive ability. For example, Six-Mile Creek takes its name from its actual length; it joins the North and the South Santee. Yet the distance across the delta is not more than a mile. But while the creeks and canals and some of the larger ditches remain, the tides and the occasional freshets and storms have a disastrous effect on the banks and high dikes. Most of these have disappeared. Fragments of some have remained; and the ancient lines of most of them are marked by growths of bushes and by moss-draped cypresses.

Thus the action of the tides, by preserving the canals and by destroying the banks, has created those very conditions most favorable for attracting wild fowl. I know of no other region where Nature has apparently conspired with such happy results to take care of her winged children. For, when the tides are high, the old fields are flooded, and to them the ducks resort to feed and to paddle around delightedly in the warm, shallow waters; when the tides are out, the ducks repair to the rivers, or pass out to sea, where they collect in amazing flocks either on the water or on long, glistening sandbars laid bare by the retreating tide. If the days are stormy, there are the old canals and ditches for ample shelter, while on the nearby coastal islands are brackish ponds and lagoons — some sheltered by high woods, others bordered by tall reeds and marsh — all of which are ideal for wild fowl on rough days.

In this region the routine of a wild duck's day can with accuracy be followed. Since at some time during the night the old fields will be flowed, he will be sure to spend a part or the whole night there, and it is then that he does most of his feeding, finding wampee, alligator acorns, duck-oats and wild rice much to his fancy. If the following

day should be cold and rough, this old mallard drake, let us say, will stay in the sheltered fields or in the warm creeks all day long — sometimes preening himself ashore (and his toilet is a matter attended to regularly and scrupulously), sometimes adrift asleep on the dreamy waters, his head under his wing, sometimes foraging assiduously in that hearty, vacuum-cleaner, duck-like fashion. But if the day be fair and still, by "daybreak" the old drake will leave the fields. His first stopping-place will be the river-edge, among those sibilant marshes he will float until after sunrise. Then he will go out to sea, or he may resort to one of the coastal island ponds. If in the river the ducks are "rafting" the drake will join one of these vast concourses, and with the myriads of his happy fellows go drifting with the tide out to sea. There are two common enemies that break up these rafts: one is a hunter; the other is a bald eagle. Often, while duck-shooting on the lower reaches of the Santee I have marveled at the almost incalculable number of ducks in one of these great rafts; and to see a great bald eagle launching himself majestically from a lonely pine on one of the coastal islands and come soaring and beating his way powerfully

toward the ducks is a wild-life sight that the observer can never forget. I recall one incident concerning an eagle that is unusual.

One morning at Cane Gap, some two miles from the mouth of the North Santee, I had out my decoys off a point of marsh. Most of the ducks that had spent the dark hours in the old fields were already rafted farther down the river. But my decoys were drawing a few — plenty to afford exciting sport. Suddenly, unobserved by me, a great eagle came beating over the marsh. To my surprise he fell among the decoys, grappled an old cedar drake, and lifted him almost out of the water. Clearly disgusted at his mistake, he released the decoy and winged his way upward, heading down the river. Far off the mighty raft of ducks spied his coming. While the eagle was still half a mile away, but remarkably clear in the morning heavens, the closer ducks began to rise. Soon with a roar like that of distant blasting they thronged into the sky. Though I knew that this breaking up of the camp-meeting would bring some stragglers past my blind, I decided to watch the eagle's maneuvers, and to let up on the ducks for a while. And he was well worth watching. He appeared to pick his duck

while that unfortunate was with the assemblage. At any rate, his movements were deliberate as only carefully planned movements can be. The duck that he wanted was a drake in a flock of four that headed northward on the rise. These fugitives appeared fully aware of their peril, for I think I never saw ducks fly so fast. But the eagle, without apparent exertion, kept up with them. I noticed that the great bird kept above the ducks, and the line of his flight bore down on them, so that by the time they came near me they were quite close to the water. About a hundred yards from my decoys the thing came off. The bald eagle, as if suddenly tired of fooling, made a sudden rush, intense and irresistible. Three ducks swerved aside, and thus escaped. The fourth was literally driven into the water. When the eagle rose he had his drake gripped tightly and held close to his body. He bore his breakfast back to the lone pine on Cedar Island.

But it should not be supposed that His Highness exerts himself every day in the manner described. On the contrary, an eagle's taking of an unwounded duck is rare. This is because he feeds on the cripples and the dead ducks that hunters leave in the delta. Indeed, such close

scavengers are bald eagles that if a man leaves at dusk a duck that he cannot find, he will have to be at the spot by daylight in the morning if he hopes to get it before an eagle does. Sometimes, but I am glad to say not often, the eagle will feed on carrion. I saw a male bald eagle on the banks of the Santee feeding with black vultures on the carcass of a hog. In the pine woods that recede from the river the eagle is something of a menace to the young of many animals. I have heard of its killing a fawn, but I never saw this. If it did, the doe must have been far away; and if it killed the fawn it must have eaten it where taken, as a fawn would be too heavy for a bald eagle to carry any great distance — unless, perchance, the little thing were caught almost at birth. I have, however, seen a wild gobbler that was killed by a golden eagle; when shot the eagle was feeding on the turkey. These interesting specimens are now in the Charleston Museum.

While the delta of the Santee has not, in twenty years, changed its aspect very much, the situation of wild life there has undergone material modification. In the old days the delta was any man's hunting-ground and the creeks and canals daily saw the canoes of negro and

white market-hunters traversing their almost endless ramifications. Some of the old-time negro "duckers" were very successful. Indeed, the record for the best shot of the delta was made by London Legree, a negro, who killed twenty-eight mallards with one shot from a musket. He caught them one cold day swarming in a half-frozen ditch, and the execution followed. But neither a white man nor a negro could long pursue this kind of a life. It is a sad but a true fact that a man reaches an age when he would rather stay by a plantation fire than shoot ducks in a freezing drizzle six miles from home, in the vast and inchoate wilderness of the delta. Yet not all this former shooting was hard. Many a day I have dropped down the river on the ebb in the early morning, and half-filled my canoe before reaching the river-mouth. Or the paddling of creeks and ditches when the tide suited would give similar results. The ducks would sometimes jump solitarily, but commonly in twos and threes. I remember once hearing my negro paddler give a sudden exclamation of surprise, at the same time bringing his cypress paddle down sharply into the edge of the river-marsh. We had paddled past a drowsy old mallard drake; and just as he

was about to jump the negro killed him with the paddle. That may be, for all I know, another record. To-day the tides are there; the ducks are there; the old fields and canals and winding, warm creeks are there. But the hunters are gone. I mean that no longer will the typical dugout cypress canoe be seen poking about in these haunts of wild life. The reason is simple. Not only the delta, but great stretches of country adjacent thereto, have been taken over by hunting clubs that are ably managed, law-abiding, and, to my way of thinking, among the most admirable game-preservers that we now have. The members of these clubs do not hunt in the old haphazard ways; they kill ducks more regularly, perhaps, but they shoot in season only, they have strict bag-limits, and they keep out the poachers and lawless hunters. Such organizations as the Santee Club, the Kinloch Club, and the Annandale Club, owning or controlling thousands of acres, conserve the wild life thereon, which distributes itself into the hinterlands beyond their preserves. Now, at one of these clubs, twenty-five ducks is the morning's bag-limit; yet I well remember the day when men, shooting in island ponds over decoys, would bring back as

many as two hundred big ducks, and sometimes more. Therefore, these great preserves, passing from the hands of the original owners, have come under the control of men who have the time and the money and the interest to care for the wild life on their lands and waters. And I think that it would be fortunate if what has happened in the Santee delta could happen elsewhere; for this is the day when only strict and intelligent game protection will insure the survival of those forms of American wild life which are most beautiful, most interesting, and most valuable.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GRAY STAG OF BOWMAN'S BANK

This title sounds as if a story is to follow; and I suppose this narrative might be dignified by calling it a story. But distinctly it is not fiction. It is just a matter-of-fact account of a rather unusual deer-hunt that I was fortunate enough to enjoy during the Christmas season of 1919. The circumstances surrounding it were somewhat romantic, perhaps; and there was a coincidence involved that seldom occurs, even in the big woods, where almost anything unexpected is likely to happen.

The time was the 31st of December, and the place the pine-lands near the mouth of the Santee. I had been at home on the plantation for a week and had had some successful hunting, but most of my time had been spent in fighting a far-reaching forest fire that threatened destruction to everything inflammable in the great coastal plain of Carolina. I know for a fact that this fire burned over a territory forty miles deep by more than a hundred miles long. Of course, here and

there it was cut off; but for the most part it made a clean sweep. The wild life of the countryside suffered less in this conflagration than might have been expected; and more than once I saw deer which seemed not in the least dismayed by the roaring flames near them. Finally the fire passed us, and then I took to the woods as usual with my gun.

On several successive trips I hunted deer near a place called Bowman's Bank, a wild and solitary stretch of swampy country about four miles from home. In the old sandy road that dipped down from the wild pine-lands, I had seen a track that showed the maker to be a stag worth following. It was, indeed, I suspected, the track of a very old friend of mine — one who on a certain occasion had played me a kind of a mean trick. He got the thing off in the manner I now describe.

Early one October morning, two years before this, a party of us had been hunting near Bowman's Bank. In the big main road we had come upon a track so large and so fresh that we had decided to let the hounds take it; but before we slipped them from the leash, four of us tiptoed a half-mile through the dewy morning woods and took up the well-known stands at the head of the

bank. Within a few minutes we heard the dogs open as they were loosed, and they lost no time in coming our way. From the manner in which they kept bearing hard toward the left, I felt sure that the buck would come out to me. The hounds surely were bringing glad tidings in my direction. They clamored through the deep bay-thicket ahead of me; they were so close that I saw them. But no deer appeared. He must have dodged, thought I, and I listened for the gun of one of my partners. Suddenly the hounds broke out of the branch and headed straight up the easy hill toward me. They came flying on the trail, and straight at me; yet not a sign of what they were running could I see. With some difficulty I stopped them and tied them up. Then I examined the ground. A big running track had come head-on over my stand. The buck must have heard us coming, and made off over my crossing about a minute before I reached it! The thing hurt me, for I had the crazy idea that a hunter sometimes gets that a certain old stag belongs to him by rights, despite a clever getaway and other significant facts. I felt no better when our party had gathered and when the stander next to me said:

"I saw the deer. I was up on a little ridge when you were in a hollow, Arch; and he went out about a hundred yards ahead of you. He surely was a beauty — and a peculiar-looking buck, too. He seemed an iron-gray color to me; and his horns were enough to give him the headache."

Well, ever since that day I had had a leaning toward Bowman's Bank which was nothing but my hankering after another sight of the gray stag that had played me so heartless a trick. And the track that I had begun to pick up in the vicinity of the bank gave me reasonable hope that my wish might be fulfilled. Although several expeditions into that section of the woods had yielded me only a spike buck, I had a feeling that something else was waiting for me there. That instinct in hunting is not a bad thing to follow; for while I have small faith in premonitions and the like, I do believe in anything that exacts patience from a hunter. In fact, it has been my experience that a man in the woods gets the chance he wants if he keeps in the game long enough.

One afternoon after dinner, which on a Southern plantation means about three o'clock, I got on a horse and turned his head toward the Bowman Bank region. In many places in the pine

forest the woods were still smouldering, and as the afternoon was still and warm, the smoke hung low. Occasionally a smoking mass of débris of some kind would suddenly burst into flame. So prevalent was the smoke that I saw myself coming home within an hour or two with nothing to show for my afternoon's ride.

Turning off from the main road I made my horse circle a small pond fringed with bays. From the farther side of the pond I was suddenly aware of a deer slipping silently out. It was too far for a shot; and it melted with astonishing quickness into the haze that now was hanging everywhere. Had I been on foot I might have come much closer on that deer, I thought. Therefore I dismounted and tied my horse on a strip of burnt ground, where, I knew, whatever fire happened to spring up near him could not cross to reach him. I went forward then on foot toward Bowman's Bank, taking the identical route that I had followed that October morning two years before when the gray stag had outwitted me. The sun was now taking a last red and glaring look through the smoke. The aspect of the forest was weird and anything but inviting. But in hunting, a man has to take the rough with

the easy; and not infrequently it is the poor-looking chance which yields the luck.

On account of the smoke, and because the sun was now going down, I knew that I had but a short while in which to do what I was going to do. There would be no long and dewy twilight, with an afterglow in which a man can see to shoot. Night and the pall of smoke would soon shut out the world from human vision. Prospects were discouraging, but I trudged onward.

Perhaps it will not be amiss for me to say that the kind of deer-hunting I was now doing is of the type that I have long enjoyed and found successful. Because the pine-lands are interlaced at almost regular intervals with narrow bay-branches, which are small water-courses grown to low underbrush, it is possible for a man to walk these out and get about as many and as sporty chances at deer as he can have in any other way. It approaches stalking as nearly as any hunting in the Southern woods can approach it. I sometimes go thus alone, and sometimes with a friend; and I have had as much luck hunting without a hound as with one. A man gets his money's worth when, in this type of still-hunting, he bounces an old stag out of his bed, and has to

hail him for business reasons within the range commanded by a shotgun. I find that a Parker twelve-gauge, with thirty-inch barrels, gives good results when loaded with this shell, which is the best I have ever seen used on deer: U.M.C. steel-lined Arrow, high-base; two and three-fourths inches long; twenty-eight grains Infallible smokeless; one and one-eighth ounces of buckshot. The second size of buckshot is preferred to the big ones, the very best being those that chamber sixteen to a shell. I was loaded with two of these shells on that smoky twilight that will live in my memory as long as memory and such things last.

I had come to a certain wide arm of swampy growth that stretched out from the dim sanctuary of Bowman's Bank, and was undecided as to whether I should cross it or pass round its edges. I decided on the former course. My way was none too easy. Smoke worried my eyes. A fire of some four years previous had left the swamp full of black snags. There were slippery hummocks of sphagnum moss and sudden pools of black water. It is a hard thing for a man to watch his footing when he is intent on looking for something else. Yet his footing is a vital matter; for

if he misses it at the critical moment, his chance may be gone.

About halfway across the melancholy morass into which I had ventured I felt as if I might just as well turn back. If anything did get up, there was hardly enough light for a shot — certainly not enough light for a decent chance. Besides, off to the left a terrible fire had suddenly begun to rage, and it appeared unreasonable to suppose that any wild life would be lying serenely so close to that withering sweep of destruction. But strange are the ways of nature, and strange are the things that sometimes happen to a woodsman.

As I was toiling on in a half-hearted way, suddenly above the dull roar and the sharp crackle of the fire I heard a familiar sound. It was the "rip" of a deer out of bay-bushes. I located the sound before I saw the deer. A buck with big antlers had jumped some thirty yards ahead of me, a little to my right. He had been lying on the very edge of the swampy arm, and on the farther side from the point at which I had entered it. I saw his horns first, and they were good to look upon. They gleamed high in the smoke. For the first twenty yards or so he ran like a fiend, in one

of those peculiar crouching runs that a buck assumes when he wants to make a speedy start. He hardly had his tail up at all. My gun was at my shoulder, but because of a dense screen of black gum and tupelo trees, I had no chance to put anything on him. And he was getting away on all six cylinders! But he was bearing a little to the left — to run over the regular stand. It was the identical stand where the buck had escaped me before. Into the gap between two trees I threw my sight. By the time the stag reached it, he thought he was clear; for the rabbit-like contortions through which he had gone at his start had given place now to regulation long leaps, with a great show of snowy tail. Indeed, that tail was the thing on which I laid my gun. But the shot seemed hopelessly far. Just beyond the stand that the buck was about to cross was a thicket of young pines. I must shoot before he reached that. Holding on the regimental flag as accurately as I could, I fired. The second barrel was ready to let go, but not a sign of a deer could be seen. "He is gone," thought I; "he's gone into that pine-thicket. It was too far, and too smoky."

I crossed the remaining part of the swamp and

made my way slowly up the sandy hill. A huge pine marks the stand there. To my amazement, stretched beside the pine lay the stag, stone dead. He lay exactly where I had stood two years before. And he was iron-gray in color! Had I been one of the ouija-board people, I suppose I should have run. But I just stood there in the twilight admiring the splendid old stag, and wondering over my absolutely dumb luck in getting him, and over the strange coincidence that I had killed him precisely where he had once escaped me. For there was no doubt in my mind that this was the same old buck. Every hunter knows how a stag will take possession of a certain territory and remain in it for many years. As to his color, I suppose that he had some strain of albinism in him. I have seen other gray deer in that part of the country; and, within twenty miles, several pure albinos have been killed.

That my luck was extraordinary I did not fully appreciate until the buck was dressed, when I discovered that the buckshot had struck him in a peculiarly vital manner. Two shots only reached him. Both of these entered the small of the back just forward of the left haunch, and ranged forward through the body, through the neck, and

lodged behind the jaw. It was no wonder that he came down without any preliminary flourishes. Had he not been going up a slight rise from me those shots probably would have taken him in the haunches and he might have kept right on. More than once I have taken old buckshot out of a deer's haunches, and the deer themselves appeared to be in prime condition.

Leaving the stag, I walked down into the swamp, carefully pacing off the distance. This I found to be eighty-nine steps. It was too long a shot; but the break had come my way. The question now was how to get my stag out of the woods. But here, too, luck favored me.

I walked toward the main road, hoping to meet a negro. To meet a negro in the pine-lands is the easiest thing a man has to do. I met one within a few hundred yards. He and I managed to get the old buck out to the road. It happened that two sisters of mine had driven down in a spring wagon for the mail, the post-office being some five miles from home. As I reached the road, I saw the wagon approaching in the dusk.

"Have you much mail?" I asked my sisters; "I have a little package here I'd like you to take home for me."

CHAPTER XX

NEGRO WOODSMEN I HAVE KNOWN

THE question of the education and economic advancement of the negro has, during the past decade, so occupied the attention of those interested in his welfare that some of those picturesque qualities that often serve to determine personality have been lost to view. Since boyhood days I have known the negro in that wild and beautiful stretch of country that borders the great delta of the Santee; and there I have delighted to observe him as a woodsman. During the past thirty years I have hunted with negroes the pinelands, the swamps, and the tortuous creeks of the delta; and the conversations we have had, both while hunting and while merely exchanging reminiscences and recalling memories, have been for the most part on the subject of woodcraft. I think it might be interesting to describe certain of these true characters; for I have long desired to do something like justice to the extraordinary powers of woodcraft that some of them possess.

To exercise these powers, these negroes I shall

describe have most unusual opportunities; for while the country in which they live was once well settled, it is now a wild and lonely land, with great plantation houses standing eight or ten miles apart. The woods are full of deer and turkeys; and the delta swarms during the winter months with migrated wild fowl. Moreover, since neither the average negro nor white man of that region hunts, game of all kinds finds a congenial home there, and is afforded opportunity to increase normally.

The first negro woodsman I shall describe is Old Galboa, the son of a former slave, who had been born and reared in Africa. He died some twenty years ago, at a great age, after having spent more than sixty years on our plantation in the Santee country. Throughout my boyhood, Galboa was to me all that is wonderful as regards knowledge of the habits of wild creatures, and all that is ingeniously skillful in the matter of outwitting them. He had been a professional fisherman and "gunnerman" of the plantation; and for half a century his only duties consisted in securing for the plantation house fish and game in season. Often I can remember my honest envy of this powerful black, whose responsibility in life

seemed to end just where mine began; I mean to say, that my recreations were his work, and his only work was my most beloved pastime. When, as a boy, school-days would begin in the autumn, how near despair was the feeling with which I regarded Old Galboa as, singing a quaint "spiritual," he would paddle away from the plantation landing in quest of mallards and widgeons, or would slouch with his inimitably wary walk into the green-and-gold silence of the autumnal pinelands in quest of deer and turkeys. But my envy of Old Galboa had as a reasonable foundation my admiration for his extraordinary success. Though I have all my life been more or less associated with woodsmen of many types, this former slave was the most uniformly successful hunter I ever knew. And he possessed secrets of wild life that have died with him.

One of these secrets was the place where he found that splendid fish, the rock bass (sometimes called the Susquehanna salmon), and how he managed to catch as many of them as he wished to take. No other man has ever, to my knowledge, taken these fish in the Santee; yet Old Galboa discovered the secret of their haunts, and seemed to know how best to capture them.

When he was very old, he promised to tell me all about the matter; but death overtook him suddenly, and I failed to secure the desired information. But I did learn from him a hundred other matters concerning the game of the Santee region, particularly the deer. It was Galboa who told my brother and me (when, as little lads, we listened wide-eyed on the steps of his old cabin, or sat beside him on a rude bench before his ever-burning chimney-fire) that an old buck will nearly always come out of a drive behind his does. "You see," the ancient hunter would explain, "he wants somebody else to try the example of the shot — yes, sah." He it was who brought us a fawn that we reared; and it was to his generosity that we owed the rather remarkable collection of alligator teeth that we gathered. As far as I ever could tell, this negro's only limitation as a hunter was his superstition. During those twilight hours when game is sometimes easily taken, Galboa did not care about being too far from home. He had too much respect for spirits to "become a borrower of the night for a dark hour or twain." I can clearly recall the solemn look that used to come over his face when he heard the weird, soft notes of the great horned owl, which he never

called anything but the "hiddle-diddle-dee" — which is not at all a poor example of onomatopœia.

I have told of this negro's success; but some men are successful only after prodigious efforts. Even some woodsmen expend a degree of energy that is remarkable. But Galboa knew how to save himself; and the simplicity of his performances had, at least to me, something of magical glamour about them. My memories would, indeed, be lacking in much that is picturesque if there were withdrawn from them my recollections of this quiet, efficient, resourceful woodsman, of invaluable service to my family, and of genuine credit to his race.

While Galboa was an independent hunter, William Snyder, the negro who for thirty years or more was our deer-driver, never went into the woods alone. He did not shoot. It was his part to ride a fast horse, to post standers, to locate deer, and drive them to the hunters, to manage a yelping, swarming pack of hounds, and to follow wounded deer or strayed dogs into what Milton might call

> Infamous hills and sandy, perilous wilds.

William was a social and genial soul; and if he

loved hunting better than anything else, I shall be the last one to blame him. He lived about three quarters of a mile from us, across a wide rice-field. His house was in plain sight from our porch. Many an autumn morning I would go out on that porch and wind the horn for William; and I seldom had to wait for more than a few minutes if I wanted to see him dismount at our house. I could see him leave his own, run to the shack where he kept his little black mare, lead her out, throw the saddle on her as if he were going for the doctor, and then I would hear the soft roll of the mare's hoofs as William made her eat up the spaces of sandy pine-land road that led to our house. Once there, he was all dispatch; the only thing that ever put him out of humor was our delaying the start. He would gather the hounds, admonish them severally, remount his mare, and sit there like an impatient centaur until we joined him.

For a description of William running his horse at full speed through the pine-woods, how can I find words! I have seen him trying to cut off a deer that had taken an insurgent notion into its head to run not according to regulations. The black mare, her long, silky tail straight out be-

hind, her graceful head far forward with the ears laid back, would skim over the level floors of the woodland, leap blithely over obstacles, flash through water, and never once falter or stumble. William, whooping melodiously at the top of his singularly musical and resonant voice, would now be lying on the mare's neck to avoid being swept away by overhanging limbs, now waving his hat with a wild surety as he let the splendid little mount have her free head. I never knew this negro to be thrown from a horse; I never saw a dog which he could not manage in the most absolute fashion; and I have known few deer that did not go where William intended that they should. Perhaps this sounds like high praise; it is not even praise. It is a bare recognition of fact. However, William's whooping did sometimes have an effect that was unfortunate. I remember that a friend of mine of a somewhat nervous temperament explained remonstratingly his missing a huge stag that ran within twenty paces of him, by saying:

"How could you expect a man to keep his nerve when that driver kept yelling like the blast of doom, 'Don't miss him! Don't miss him! 'T is the old buck! Don't miss him!'"

William's chief value as a woodsman consisted

in his prescience in locating deer. When riding along his eyes were always fixed on the ground. He was a tracker; and he was so familiar with the deer-haunts that he could find a deer merely by noticing the freshness of the sign and the direction that the track had taken. He had what I think the most indispensable part of true field equipment: a genuine game sense. He was a game-finder; and if the deer and turkeys were not secured, the fault lay with us.

There is another negro in the Santee country whose woodcraft merits an especial interest. He is Gabriel, the trapper. He is still alive; and from a conversation I recently had with him, his past few seasons have been very prosperous ones. Even to the remote wilds of the Santee the news of the high price on furs has penetrated, although the negro trapper never gets a fair proportion of the profit that good skins are now bringing.

Gabriel is a hunter for whom the night has no terrors; and he is therefore singularly successful in the matter of trapping those forms of animal life that prowl the old plantations' regions during the dark hours. Wildcat, otter, mink, raccoon, fox, and opossum are the fur-bearers he follows. So skillful is he with his trapping that I have

known him to catch an old mallard drake by setting a very light spring-trap on a floating hummock of marsh roots. He is one of the few men in the Santee country who has trapped the otter, an animal so wary and intelligent that a man might live in that region a lifetime without ever even seeing one. He has discovered that the best lure for the fox is not, as might be supposed, a chicken or a bird, but a burned sweet potato! How he discovered this is past my understanding. Finding it difficult to trap a certain old red fox, he used this ruse: In the middle of a broad and shallow stream he built a small artificial island. To this he ran an old log from either bank. A fox loves to travel a log, especially over water. Then for a week or more he left bait on the island. When he discovered that it was being taken, he hollowed a place in one of the old logs and therein set his trap. I saw the hide of this fox, and it was a beautiful specimen. Gabriel, it was, also, who was with me one day when we caught a great bull alligator that had long been a menace to the plantation stock. Catching this marauder was not a difficult task, but what Gabriel did when we brought him ashore was what not many men could be persuaded to attempt.

We had hooked the alligator on a long plough-line with a big shark-hook attached. The hook was not very firmly embedded in the bull's massive jaws; consequently, in his struggles on the shore after we had pulled him clear of the water, he threw the clumsy, blunt hook out of his mouth. There, within ten feet of us, lay the fifteen-foot reptile, unhurt, truculent, and dangerous. Slowly he turned toward the water. I confess that I was at a loss what to do; the situation called for native resourcefulness that I did not possess. Gabriel, however, was equal to the occasion. Seizing the rope in his left hand, he leaped lithely down the slope. He avoided a savage sweep of the alligator's powerful tail, a weapon to be dreaded. While maneuvering for the opening he wished, the negro had swiftly made a slipknot in the end of the rope. When he saw the proper chance, which was not until the scaly bull was almost at the water-line, Gabriel leaped directly for him, and sat down suddenly on the great saurian's back! To use a nautical term, he was immediately abaft the alligator's front legs — a point of vantage from which he could not well be reached either by the monster's tail or jaws. In a moment the skillful negro had slipped the

noose over the alligator's head and had drawn the loop tightly behind the bull's massively articulated jaws. Then he cleared himself with a single bound, and handed me politely the other end of the rope! I do not know that I ever saw a woodsman perform a difficult feat so quickly and with so unassuming a deftness and surety. But Gabriel's like is not to be frequently found.

The number, indeed, of negroes who are genuine woodsmen is comparatively small. I know personally about seven hundred negroes who live in situations which would naturally lead one to suppose that they would hunt and fish extensively. But it is not so. The same fact holds with the white man. How few in any community are interested in the pursuit of game! In a settlement of negroes consisting of a dozen families, perhaps only one genuine hunter is to be found. The great hunting clubs which have splendid preserves in many parts of the South have learned to their chagrin that many of the negroes employed as guides and deer-drivers know absolutely nothing of woodcraft. And it is a hard matter to train a grown man to be a woodsman; the training should begin with childhood; indeed, it is often a matter of pure heritage. Whenever a club of

the type mentioned learns that there is a formidable negro hunter in its region, it is careful to put him at once in its employ, in this manner insuring itself of the services of a good man and also ridding itself of the probable menace of a wary and efficient poacher.

Of all the genuine negro poachers I have ever known, West McConnor is the most vivid and proficient — vivid in personality, and surely the last word in proficiency when it comes to carrying out his designs. One might suppose that a man of West's far-heralded reputation would be stalwart in frame and frowning in countenance. It is not so. West is small, slight, stooping; and he speaks with a lisping drawl. Yet among his own people he is the one negro I have ever known who is positively dreaded. There is something sinister about his character which is perhaps the effect of the singular paradox of his mild appearance and his marvellous power. For West is known all over Charleston and Berkeley counties as a desperate man, at whose door strange crimes may be laid. However this may be, I am not concerned with it; he interests me as a personality. He is a prodigious game-getter. He lives by his gun. And he ranges a vast scope of country;

sometimes in a dugout cypress canoe, sometimes afoot. Often when I have been hunting miles from home, West has suddenly appeared out of the densest jungle and approached for a friendly word and the exchange of the day's hunting experiences. But I have observed that it was never I who detected the approach of this silent negro; I think he always sees me a half-hour or so before I see him. He is a still-hunter of those vast and melancholy swamps that moulder in the ancient silentness of primeval peace. He is the only professional alligator-hunter in the Santee delta; and his prowess in this particular type of endeavor may be judged when I say that, in a lonely stretch of pine-land not far from his house, there are the skulls of the alligators he has killed, and that a half-acre of the pine-land floor is whitened by these bones. On more than one occasion I have gone there and gathered more than a quart of fine alligator teeth. It is, perhaps, a gruesome place; but it undoubtedly testifies to the skill of this negro hunter.

Whenever I want to know definitely about game, whether of the delta or of the swamps or of the pine-lands, I consult West. Among the negro woodsmen of my acquaintance, he is the special-

ist. Except when discussing secrets of the wild, he is a silent, almost shy man, with a touch of that uncanny spirit that not infrequently attaches to those who have spent their lives in outwitting the best intelligence of the game world. I have heard that West is at the head of all the negro fraternal organizations of our part of the country; and if so, he should be the man for such places, for his ascendancy is but the recognition of certain superior and masterful elements in his character. I have said that he is a hunter of proficiency. By this I mean that, since the passing of Old Galboa, West is the only negro I know who can go into the woods after a certain kind of game, and return with it, with almost unerring certainty and dispatch. It is an easy matter sometimes for any one to kill a deer or a wild turkey; but even the most hardened hunter is often baffled in an attempt to secure a certain type of game at a certain time. West McConnor can do this; and with an ease and nonchalance that are impressive. Some negroes, especially those who fear him, claim that his success is due to a league that he has with dark and mysterious powers. But nothing save his own eerie skill brings him his extraordinary success.

Whatever the future may bring to the negro in the matters of economic and political advancement, I trust that such progress will not efface from certain types of the race those hardy and generous qualities that are bred in a man who has followed the calling of Esau. All the negroes of the Santee country are interesting to me; but, after the appealing little children, the negro hunters most engage my attention. And I trust that I have in this brief chapter done something like justice to their characters.

CHAPTER XXI

A PLANTATION CHRISTMAS

In the rural sections of the South, and especially on the great estates and plantations, Christmas is probably as picturesquely celebrated as anywhere in the world. The Christmas found there has an old-English flavor; it is the jovial Christmas of Dickens. There are manifest the high spirit, the boisterous cheer, the holly, the mistletoe (not starved wreaths and single branches, but whole trees of holly and huge bunches of mistletoe) the smilax, the roaring fires of oak and pine, the songs, the laughter, the happy games, and all the festive enjoyments of the old-time Cavaliers. Whatever else may be said of those who settled the South from the Court of Charles I, who, according to Edmund Burke, "had as much pride as virtue in them," they certainly knew how to make themselves happy at Christmas; and this characteristic they have bequeathed to their descendants. While their rollicking spirit may not be so nearly akin to that of the Original Christmas as the stern joy of the sober-hearted Puri-

tans, their souls were warmer and their homes were happier and more picturesque. The Puritan had the lilies and the snow and the wintry starlight of mystic love and devotion; the Cavalier had the roses, the red wine, and the ruddy fireside of human affection.

To see how a typical plantation Christmas in the South is observed you must go with me far through the pine-woods that fringe the South Carolina coast, to one of those old plantations that lie along the Santee River delta. As we drive along the level road, the great forest will withdraw from us on all sides, disclosing magic vistas and mysterious swamp views, or perhaps a still stretch of water retired mistily among the pines. In every water-course there will be elm- and gum-trees, burdened with great bunches of mistletoe; while beside the road, beautiful in their symmetry, their foliage, and their berries lovely holly-trees will invite our fascinated eyes. And probably in the hollies or in the black-gums or tupelos of the swamp, but surely darting swiftly among the tall pines, the light of the sinking sun striking vividly on their scarlet breasts, we shall see a hundred, possibly a thousand, robins, joyous among the delights afforded by

the Southern winter. Almost as friendly, though far less numerous than the robins, are the cedar waxwings. Among the other birds which give real meaning and cheer to the season are the wood thrush, the Carolina wren, the cardinal, the mocking-bird, the catbird, the brown thrasher, and many kinds of sparrows, notably the Peabody-bird, which is so welcome a summer visitant to the Northern States. Besides these common birds we may catch sight of a wild turkey, a flock of bright-colored wood-ducks, or a giant black pileated woodpecker.

After our drive through the woods we shall enter the plantation gateway, sentineled by century-old live-oaks, and overhung with blossoming sprays of fragrant yellow jasmine. We drive past the cotton-field whose dry bolls rattle and whisper in the wind, past the clustered sweet potato banks and the tobacco drying-houses, until beneath its ancient trees the snowy pillars of the great house come into view. As we approach the steps we see a red woodbine festooned over a cedar frame in the flower garden, and groups of rose bushes laden with buds and blooms. The sun has now gone down behind the dark pines, and the sky above them is softly aflame; and

there in that red setting the evening star glitters like a dewdrop on a poppy flower.

It is Christmas Eve on the old plantation, and everywhere there is an air of expectancy, especially among the negroes, who, like children, feel most deeply the material joys of the season. And they share, too, in the mystic meaning of the Holy Night. From far-off cabins, sunk deep in the pines or across waste rice-land or on the open uplands, there come sounds of singing, the melody of the negro voices blending wondrously on the calm night air. Their hymns of "spirituals" they can render with amazing feeling and felicity.

The negroes have a pretty superstition to the effect that at midnight on Christmas Eve all the birds and animals go down on their knees in adoration of their Lord. I remember, as a little boy, creeping out to the chicken-yard with my brother in the dead of night to spy and see whether the wondrous thing would happen, really believing that it would. But we were forced to the melancholy conclusion that the fowls were agnostics; for though, seen by the blanching moonlight, they ruffled their feathers and stretched their necks, they did not take an attitude of reverence.

While we sit in the balmy air on the broad white veranda, listening to the singing as it floats softly through the night, the spirit of Christmas comes very near to us. There among the ancient oaks the wind through the swaying mosses breathes olden runes, while the Christmas stars above the solemn woods hold the promise of eternal light.

After the children have gone to bed in the great rambling plantation house, we begin arranging the Christmas presents; and these include not only the number for the family, but those for the servants, and the servants' families, friends, and visitors, and the friends' and visitors' friends, and so on. Many will come, and every one will get a present. There must always be a reserve store of gifts for cases of emergency in the form of negroes who come unexpectedly. Many boxes for distribution come to us from the North, from friends who, having visited us during the hunting season, remember the needs of the negroes and answer their silent appeals generously.

Early Christmas morning stealthy steps are heard along the halls; then there will be a soft knock, a shout of "Merry Christmas! Christ-

mas gift!" from some one of the older servants; then peals of laughter from the delighted negro and from the victim who has been caught napping. Often on the plantation we feign ignorance of the approach of some favorite servants just to give them the real delight that our apparent consternation affords them.

After the first surprises and greetings are over, fires — genuine Christmas fires — are kindled on all the hearths — fires that are soon merrily ablaze with that old-English cheer that none but the right wood can give. Southern fires do not have to run the dread gantlet of infant paralysis; nor are they dependent on newspaper, kerosene, and other abominable means of tender solicitude. "Lightwood" suffices for all their needs. It is the rich pine, full of highly inflammable resin that does the work in an instant. The favorite wood for backlogs is live-oak, which will burn for many hours with a soft ruddy glow that gives out great heat. Scrub-oak or black-jack is more popular for general purposes because it is so plentiful; while tupelo, elm, black gum, and sap pine fill in those gaps in the yawning fireplaces between the kindling sticks and the giant yule log.

A Christmas breakfast on a Southern plan-

tation is one of those leisurely and delightful events that have no definite beginning or ending, but which are aglow throughout with the light and warmth of mirth, fellowship, and affection. Perhaps a cup of tea and a roll and marmalade, with a bunch of fresh violets or a rose from the garden on the tray, will be served first, as we gather on the piazza. Later there will be an elaborate breakfast in the quaint old dining-room, where, by the red firelight, and watched intently by the frieze of deer's antlers festooned with holly and smilax, we shall pass two happy hours. Among the truly Southern dishes most enjoyed are the roasted rice-fed mallards, the venison sausages, and the crisp, brown corn-breads.

After breakfast we shall all repair to the vast old echoing ballroom, which occupies one whole wing of the house — a room with carved wainscoting, waist-high, with tall, faded mirrors between the high windows, and blue tiling of antique designs on the sides of the fireplace. It is a room fragrantly haunted by memories of the past, where the strains of the minuet and the courtly grace of the dancers of colonial days would seem far more fitting than our practical presence. But our coming to the ballroom has a real Christmas

significance, which is what most concerns us now; for it is here that we give presents to the negro children. They, dressed in their best Sunday clothes, have been gathering for hours from our own plantation and from those adjacent ones whose sole occupants now are their tenants. And now they come happily into the room through the dark entryway at the back, the older ones, who recall the joys of other years, leading and reassuring the tots who seem awed at the expanse of the room and the light of the stately candles.

Their ages run from two to ten; their faces are remarkably bright and appealing. There is little stolid dullness, but in its place we see big bright eyes, rows of snowy teeth, and chubby black hands that will soon be filled with the generous stores of Santa Claus. Most of the children have a touch of color about their dress; one will wear a red necktie, one a string of blue beads, while a third may be the proud possessor of a favorite, though exclusive, mode of decoration, namely, a white or colored handkerchief pinned on the front of the shirt or dress or on the lapel of the jacket. As its secure fastening indicates, it is for purposes of ornament only.

On two long tables before the ranged rows of negro children, their gifts are heaped high; and these include not only toys and trinkets and candy, but useful and durable gifts such as shoes and stockings, little dresses and suits, and many other kinds of apparel. Some of the children are too bewildered to appreciate their happiness; others in their joy will begin to dance (as this is the most spontaneous way for them to express their feelings), tentatively at first; but soon the whole crowd will join, and even the tiniest tot, clutching her gifts tightly, will lift her skirts and go through the swiftest and most intricate movements with great dexterity. This dancing is always a feature of a plantation Christmas.

Of course there is always a big deer-hunt on Christmas Day; though there is a proverb in the South that Christmas is hard on a hunter's aim. A Christmas hunting party is picturesque in a high degree. Gathering in a pre-arranged meeting-place, all the planters in that section of the country will appear dressed for the festival, each with his hounds trailing after him in the order of their enthusiasm. The presence of some planters who hunt on Christmas only, and who have never been known to hit anything, offers the wags of the

party a rarer sport than deer could afford. About this company there is a spirit of irresponsibility, of holiday laxity that Southern hunters, who take their sport seriously, do not usually indulge in. As they ride away under the pines, to the winding of horns and the barking of dogs, they appear like some cavalcade of old, riding away into the shadows of the past. Into the woods they go, the wonderful woods of the Southern coast country, a company of merry gentlemen, light-hearted and — since the day is a festival — perhaps a little light-headed, too.

The return from the hunt is usually made about dark; and out at the barn the deer is unslung and the hounds begin to clamor for their share. By flickering lanterns and red-flaring lightwood torches the work is done. At the blowing of a horn the negroes come from their cabins for venison steaks. Then will follow the royal Christmas dinner, served by candlelight. Rare merriment goes with hunters' appetites, and the house echoes with laughter that courses about the old-fashioned board.

Then once more we shall gather about the generous fireplace to hear the old Colonel tell how he shot the buck, recounting with delight

that the negro driver had shouted to his fellow-beaters, "Put on the pot, boys, de Cunnel is done shoot!" of how this or that dog conducted himself in the race; of how the sly old gobbler slipped away, and the whole series of adventures of the day.

And now the fire is very low; only the great live-oak log glows like a bed of rubies in the cavernous black chimney. The Colonel is asleep in his armchair, his favorite hound drowsing on the hearth at his feet. The room is hushed and the heavy curtains are motionless. The old stag's head gazes down with human wistfulness and the faded portraits seem alive in the soft shadows. The big clock above the fireplace intones the midnight in its mellow way. Christmas Day on the plantation is over.

THE END

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